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1 Corinthians 9:22b-23 -

Restoration Road Church

Gospel Class 9

The Cultural Mandate

session nine:
the cultural mandate

What is Missiology?

I Corinthians 9:22b-23 - *I [Paul] have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this all for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings.*

“Missional” Christianity is comprised of three basic elements in life:

- First, there is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the heart of the Scriptures and climax of the revelation of God. The gospel must be kept in the forefront of every Christian's life.
- Second, there are the cultures in which people live their lives. These lives both shape and are shaped by those cultures and the gospel must be fitted (not altered) to particular people, times and circumstances so that evangelism can effectively occur.
- Third, there is the church, or gathering of God's people -- which does include people who are not Christians (Matthew 13:24-30) – where people are built up in their faith and knitted together in loving community so that they can faithfully engage people in the culture with the gospel.

If this process ever fails to continually occur, the focus moves from the gospel to either cultural agendas or church agendas that are often different than God's agenda, which is the gospel. Missiology is simply an unwavering commitment among God's people to the gospel in the culture as the church.

What is culture?

“It (culture) takes in media, advertising, information technology, fashion, ritual, worship, academic disciplines, public symbols, lifestyles and everyday practices such as automobile commuting or childbearing...Culture lends significance to human experience by selecting from and organizing it. It refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives, rather than more narrowly to the opera or art museums. It does not inhabit a set-aside domain.... For the pirouettes of classical ballet to the most brute of brute facts, all of human conduct is culturally mediated. Culture encompasses the everyday and the esoteric, the mundane and the elevated, the ridiculous and the sublime.” – Rodney Clapp

“When we speak of culture in its broadest sense, we are speaking about the sum total ways of living that shape (and also are shaped by) the continuing life of a group of human beings from generation to generation. We are speaking about the language that enables them to grasp, conceptualize, and communicate the reality of their world; about law, custom, and forms of social organization, including marriage, family, and agriculture. These things shape the life of each member of the society. They are also shaped, modified, and developed from generation to generation by the members of the society. From the point of view of the

individual member they are given as part of the tradition into which he or she is born and socialized. But they are not changeless absolutes.” – Leslie Newbigin

When we speak of culture we are discussing an enormous framework within which all of life occurs for a person or people. Ours is a multicultural and pluralistic society in which there are a seemingly endless number of cultures, subcultures, and tribes. Similarly, the Scriptures reveal that at the time of Jesus there also existed varying cultures of Jews, Romans, and Greeks. Even among the Jews, there are varying cultures of Jews such as the Pharisees and Sadducees; the differences between these groups is vast and a frequent source of conflict.

For purposes of simplicity we will speak briefly about three categories through which we can view culture:

- The cognitive aspect of a culture includes the broad and varied ways of thinking and subsequent beliefs that people hold. This includes such things as their view of truth, science, history, experience, etc.
- The evaluative aspect of culture includes the values that govern what people deem important as demonstrated by how they act, and what they make sacrifices for. How they invest their time, energy, money, and passion reveal what people value. Further assessment takes place through careful listening of what people talk about, observing what they rally around, or identifying what shared values build their social network. When unearthing values it is important to note distinguish values from ideals. Ideals are things people wish they valued and care for in theory but not in practice (i.e. a “Christian” who doesn’t pray, read the Bible, or attend church).
- The affectual aspect of culture includes the collection of experiences that shape people either because they have chosen them, or have had them forced upon them. These experiences range from the exhilarating and public to devastating and private. These experiences both shape and reflect a person and their culture. These experiences vary greatly and include everything from sexual practices, entertainment pleasures, recreational activities, tragedies, etc.

All of these factors (cognitive, evaluative, affectual) combine to compose a local culture. People under varying circumstances for a milieu of reasons weigh them more or less heavily. This makes culture very fluid, organic, and unsettled.

What is the world?

Cultures are not entirely morally and spiritually neutral. These broken cultures still contain the influences of God’s image and likeness imprinted upon people but it is always marred and bent away from God’s glory. This bent aspect of culture is called the “world” throughout the Scriptures.

According to the Apostle John, “the world” is the manifestation of the lust of our flesh, lust of our eyes, and the same boastful pride of life finds its source in Satan (1 John 2:16; 1 John 5:19). Once God transforms our heart, we are no longer of this world (John 17:14) but immediately become citizens of the eternal Kingdom completely unlike this world with corrupt desires that are passing away (John 18:36; 1 John 2:17). We are commanded to not love this world (1 John 2:15). We are promised that the world will both not understand us (1 John 3:1) and hate us as it did our Lord (1 John 3:13) while it loves liars who proclaim God’s approval of this world in its’ present state of war against Him (1 John 4:1, 4:5).

The Apostle James tells us that part of our religious duty is to keep ourselves from being polluted by this world (James 1:27), watch our tongue which speaks hell into this world (James 3:6) and not become friends with this world lest we make ourselves enemies of God (James 4:5). The Apostle Peter commands that we be alive to Christ and dead to the sinful temptations in this world (1 Peter 2:11) that we might avoid the corruption that those evil desires cast upon us (2 Peter 1:4). And, paradoxically, all of this is to occur in the

world. As the Father sent the Son into this world, and the Father and Son sent the Spirit into this world, so the Father, Son, and Spirit have sent us into the world (John 17:18; I John 4:9) and live in us thus enabling us to overcome this world by being like Jesus (I John 4:4, 5:4-5; I John 4:17).

The Apostle Paul condemns the world as a source of saving wisdom for God's people, emphatically proclaiming that the world and all of its collective wisdom does not know God (I Corinthians 1:20-21) because it is filled with folly that too many parade as wisdom (I Corinthians 1:27-28). The world's wisdom is filled with arrogant and hollow human speculation about life and God (Colossians 2:8, 2:20-23) because it is governed by Satan (Ephesians 2:2, 2:12) who is using the world to enslave people to sin and death (Galatians 3:22, 4:3) and stands condemned by God (I Corinthians 11:32).

Therefore, the people of God are commanded to have renewed thinking so that they would no longer be conformed to the pattern of the world (Romans 12:2) and be able to combat the world with the gospel weapons of grace, love, and truth that the world does not have access to (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

What is syncretism? – Culture Above the Gospel

Romans 12:2 – *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world...*

Syncretism is the elevating of culture above the gospel of Jesus Christ and polluting the clear teachings of the Scriptures with the muddled agendas and beliefs of the world. This sin is commonly known as “liberal Christianity” and includes everything from the golden calf the Hebrews worshipped in the Old Testament to the sexual immorality and drunkenness the Corinthian church was supporting; from the common and non-biblical “Christian” teaching in our own day that promotes the Bible as myth, Jesus as merely a good man, and the belief that everyone will ultimately go to heaven, to ideas such as politics is the purpose of the church, homosexuality is acceptable, sin is an outdated idea, etc. etc. etc. A syncretized “Christianity” always elevates people, reduces God, and neglects the offensive parts of the Bible in an effort to be more culturally acceptable.

What is sectarianism? – Church Above the Gospel

John 17:15 – *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world...*

Sectarianism is the elevating of the church above the gospel of Jesus Christ and the polluting of the clear teachings of Scripture to love our neighbors and preach the gospel to every person (Mark 16:15). This is because it is wrongly believed that if a Christian befriends a non-Christian they will somehow catch their sins as if sin were the flu. Such a person prefers to spend all their time hidden in the Christian subculture naively believing that all the sin and wicked people in the world were exclusively outside of their church.

To justify their extreme sectarianism they will often misquote the King James version of I Timothy 5:22 and command that we avoid every appearance of evil when, in fact, it rightly says that we should avoid every kind of evil—a different matter altogether. That is one of the reasons why the Pharisees crucified Christ. Though Jesus never committed any evil (Hebrews 4:15), he did not avoid the appearance of evil and was condemned as a drunkard and glutton because some of the lost people he befriended for the sake of redemption were (Luke 7:34).

What does it mean to be “counter culture”?

Ephesians 4:17-24 – *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles [non-Christians] do in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and*

were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Though God has chosen the times and places in which we live (Acts 17:26), this world is not our home. We are aliens in a foreign land journeying through on our way to God's kingdom hoping to encourage others to love Jesus and journey with us (1 Peter 2:9-12). As we walk through the days of our lives, we are to live in a way that is distinctively different from people who do not love God as evidence of the saving work of Jesus in our lives. These good works are not to earn our salvation, but rather to show the great power of the grace we've received from God (Ephesians 2:8-10). To counter culture, therefore, is in many ways to swim against the stream of the world to show the wisdom of God and folly of all other wisdom (1 Corinthians 1-2).

Counter cultural living among God's people is to be done in humility out of love for God and for our neighbors with the goal that those who do not know God would see His work in our lives and thirst for Him. This is the pattern that emerges throughout the book of Acts with the early church where God's people shared meals, possessions, housing and all of life together as a loving extended family who could forgive one another's sins and live in grace because of Jesus. This peculiar kind of gospel centered counter culture was of such great intrigue to outsiders that they began to inquire about the source of life in the early church and the answer was always that Jesus had risen from the grave and ushered in the beginnings of a new kingdom (Acts 1:22, 2:24, 2:31, 3:15, 4:2, 4:10, 4:33, 5:30, 10:40, 13:33, 13:37, 17:3, 17:18, 17:32, 23:6, 24:15, 24:21, 25:19, 26:8, 26:23).

What is contextualization?

Though the gospel of Jesus Christ never changes (1 Corinthians 15:3-8), it must be contextualized (or fitted) to the culture it is brought to. This would include making sure the gospel was spoken in a language people could understand with concepts that were faithful to the Bible and simultaneously understandable by the hearers. This kind of ministry takes great wisdom and careful scrutiny by God's people to ensure neither syncretism nor sectarianism occurs.

Every church has a contextualized gospel and therefore must continually undergo reform to continue the missiological work of the gospel in their time and place. When churches fail to reform they inevitably begin to die and become increasingly disconnected and irrelevant to the people and cultures around them. The problem is that God's people often wrongly assume that everyone in the world is basically like them. This is why every time the gospel crosses from one culture into another (usually solely by God's doing as was the case with Cornelius in Acts 10) there ensues a rigorous debate to sort out what is gospel, what is sin, and what is simply baggage added to the gospel as it was contextualized in a culture.

In Paul's day, this included such things as the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, day of worship, circumcision, dietary restrictions, sexual immorality etc. (Acts 10, 15; Romans 14-15; 1 Corinthians 10:14-33). In fact, much of the content of the New Testament epistles concerns the apostles' effort in sorting out the issues that arose as the gospel reached new people and cultures. In our own day issues include such things as day and time of worship, body modification (i.e. piercings, tattoos, breast implants, plastic surgery), musical style in worship, styles of dress, sexual preference, authority, language etc. It is our responsibility as the church to faithfully and wisely sort out the issues as they arise in each cultural context to determine what is sin and what is cultural freedom that God permits.

Fortunately, the four gospels in our Bible show us exactly how this kind of gospel contextualization should occur. While each gospel is absolutely unified in their central teachings, each gospel also emphasizes some various truths to best speak to varying cultures of people.

Gospel	Author	Primary Audience	Contextualization of Jesus	Missiological Features
Matthew	Jewish tax collector, disciple & eyewitness (Matt. 10:3)	Jews	Messiah/King who fulfills the Law	Genealogy to Abraham & David w/sinful women included, roughly 60% is Jesus words, numerous OT references (over 30 OT prophecies fulfilled), God called Father 46 times,
Mark		Romans	Servant	Briefest gospel, divides into Jesus deeds & death at 10:45, fewer OT quotes, action abounds (over 150 present tense verbs), over 40% is Jesus words, 18 of Jesus 35 miracles, no genealogy and little attention to first 30 years of Jesus life
Luke	Brilliant Gentile Doctor (Col. 4:14)	Gentiles	Perfect Man whom all of the OT pointed to	Most historical detail & chronological ordering, Jesus genealogy traced to Adam (humanity), about half of the gospel is Jesus words, 13 women mentioned that are omitted from other gospels, Jewish traits explained (i.e. 4:31, 8:26), emphasis on grace, most detail of Jesus youth, Jesus emotions highlighted
John	Beloved & youngest, part of Jesus inner circle, eyewitness, longest living	Greeks	God Incarnate who came that we might believe and have eternal life	Few OT quotes, many OT allusions, over 90% of John is unique, no parables given, I AM statements of Jesus clarify divinity, key words include know and believe, reappropriation of Greek philosophical concepts

A lesson from Daniel

Daniel was raised in Judah as a young Jewish man of noble birth with exemplary health, education, and knowledge of Scripture. As a young man, likely a teen, he was taken into exile in Babylon against his will but under the sovereign hand of God who uses even exile and captivity as means for His mission to bring the gospel to all nations of the earth, even those as godless and wicked as Babylon. Babylon was ruled by king Nebuchadnezzar, who robbed God's temple to fill his own temple dedicated to his false god. He then chose some of the finest young men to be trained for service to Babylon, its king, and its gods.

At first glance, young Daniel appears to have completely syncretized the gospel with Babylonian paganism as a *good cultural liberal*. He graduates from the top of his class in witchcraft, sorcery, astrology, magic, dream interpretation, divination, and the occult. He genuinely loves and cares for the king of Babylon and seeks to serve him well and speaks to his servants with wisdom and tact, becoming a trusted advisor as well as a key political leader in the ruling of Babylon.

Daniel even changed his name from that honored a son of David, and a priest with the same name in Scripture, to the Babylonian name Belteshazzar that was likely a name honoring a pagan Babylonian god. Upon further examination, however, young Daniel appears to have completely separated the gospel and himself from Babylonian paganism as a *good culturally conservative fundamentalist*. Daniel refused to bow down to the false gods and idols of Babylon. Daniel refused to stop praying to and worshipping his God alone. Daniel refused to eat the king's food. And Daniel was willing to die if needed to not violate his conscience and the scriptures as he walks with his accountability group/missions team of spiritual friends.

From Daniel, we see the *tension* of a missionary trying to be faithful to God in the time and place he has been sent. Daniel is very helpful to the king yet clearly tells him he is an enemy of God needing repentance. Daniel is as keenly aware of sinful Babylonian culture as anyone yet in no way endorses or participates in its worldly elements. Daniel is recognized as a capable and skilled man yet continually attributes all of his wisdom and insight to his God whom the king even recognizes lives in Daniel.

What does this look like at Restoration Road?

In his book "The Celtic Way of Evangelism" George Hunter re-appropriates the ancient Celtic means of evangelizing in contrast to the Roman mode of evangelism that has largely dominated American Christianity. Roman evangelism has been popularized by faithful men such as Billy Graham, and codified by programs such as Campus Crusade's Four Spiritual Laws. In the local church it can be seen in the large events (i.e. concerts, community fairs, felt needs lectures, tent revivals, etc.) that are intended to draw large crowds to hear a gospel presentation and call to decision by a recognized spiritual authority.

While this mode has proven faithful in the past, and remains fruitful in many cultural contexts, people in our culture live lives filled with entertainment, sales pitches, marketing, self-help seminars and large emotionally moving events of various sorts and are therefore unimpressed by a large church event and unlikely to give up a precious evening or weekend to attend into a church event. So, the Celtic model of getting the church people out to them is more likely to be both faithful and fruitful.

Roman Evangelism(bringing people in)	Celtic Evangelism(sending Christians out)
Presentation of Gospel Information	Spiritual friendship between a Christian and non-Christian
Call to a decision	Participation in ministry & church
If an affirmative decision is made, the person is welcomed into the church	Ongoing presentation of gospel in word & deed
Friendship extended	Faith & conversion
Training for service in ministry	Church celebration & continuing ministry

In the Roman model, the gospel is presented as a series of factual statements that when *intellectually accepted*, allows one to flip a switch within the hearer that gives them faith and passes them from death to life. The obstacle to the "flipping of the switch" is seen as the human will which needs to be prodded toward a decision with such things as emotional appeals, touching music, and frightening threats of hell to move the hearer toward a decision. If a person walks forward, stands up, raises their hand, or indicates by

some other means their decision, they are deemed a convert and told to assimilate into a church. Whether or not they were truly converted is highly debatable, and their odds of assimilating into a church are highly unlikely unless they already have a trustworthy friendship with someone already connected in a church.

In the Celtic model, people are called to come and see before they are called to repent and believe (John 1:35-51). In the Celtic model the gospel is presented first as a genuine friendship with someone who is a Christian who does not hide his or her faith or push it rudely. The non-Christian is actively ushered into the web of relationships among the church and welcomed to be involved (though not leading) in the activities of the church that interest them (i.e. helping run the concerts, helping guide a rock climbing expedition, playing on a softball team, managing the web site, joining a Bible study) and the missionary members of the church continue in prayer for the person and seek to demonstrate the love of God in practical ways (i.e. bringing meals to moms who have just had a child, helping a young band record their album, giving a band a place in the church to practice, housing people needing help, giving Bibles and books of interest etc.) not to complete strangers, but instead people who by all accounts do not know God but are in genuine friendship with missionary members of the church who do. In this way the non-Christian is not connecting with the church in terms of events and large programs, but instead smaller face-to-face ongoing contact with people who love and speak truthfully to them.

Over time the non-Christian's social circle begins to include more and more Christian friends and they participate in the church (i.e. serving but not leading in a ministry, poking around the web site, attending church, having meals in people's homes, attending a Bible study on basic Christianity, going through biblical premarital counseling etc.) as a byproduct of being part of the social network of the church. The non-Christian sees the very natural and practical outworking of the gospel in people's lives and begin to identify themselves with the church before they identify themselves by speaking of "our church" and "my church"—which we do not believe indicates faith but is a good step along their journey to speak of "our Jesus" and "my Jesus". As trust builds with their friends and the church, they have become accustomed to hearing about Jesus Christ often and at some point God gives them faith and they pass from death to life. This precise moment is often unknown to us and what we are less concerned about is the exact moment of their salvation, and more concerned about their understanding of the gospel and love for Jesus Christ that changes them as they become new creations in Christ.

The non-Christians are not pressured to confess Christ, but well aware that Christian friends are praying for them and desires them to be saved. So, when they do become Christians, they confess Christ to their friends who are overjoyed and spread the good news throughout their social network in the church that results in great joy and celebration. The new Christian then usually asks to be baptized so they can make a public profession of faith. We encourage them to invite their friends and family to their baptism so that they can begin their work as a missionary who is to remain in those relationships for the purpose of bringing the gospel as it was brought to them.

Controversial cultural issues in and around Marysville

Everett has a plethora of cultures, and a few issues are of heightened interest in our largely non-Christian, young, and morally permissive city. Some of these more debated issues include:

- *Gender (what is a man and what is a woman?),*
- *Authority (does anyone have any authority over anyone else?)*
- *Sexuality (is any sexual activity wrong?)*
- *Family (is living together, abortion, marriage, etc. anyone's business?)*
- *Relativism (is there such a thing as right and wrong?)*
- *Technology (is technology a savior or a curse?)*
- *Community (why am I lonely)*

- *Psychology (why are so many people depressed?)*
- *Spirituality (aren't all sincere people equal before God?)*
- *And many more...*

It will be our great privilege before God to be a church that engages the culture of our city with the good news of the gospel that is ultimately the answer to every question.

In the early church, a number of “teams” emerged with their own game plans regarding how to live for God in this world. The spirit of these same groups still dominate many churches in our own day. The following chart describes these teams and demonstrates why we seek to continually reform ourselves to remain true to the work God has called us to in this time and place.

	Pharisees/ Fundamentalists	Saducees/ Liberals	Zealots/ Political Right & Left	Essenes/ Hyper Experientialists	Disciples
Objective	Personal holiness	Cultural relevance	Political change	Personal encounter	God's glory in Christ
Means	Separation & regulation	Accommodation & adoption of culture	Vocal & active power, force, & authority	Withdrawal, detachment, self-denial,	Saying, being, doing the gospel together
Gospel	Law alone	Grace alone	Salvation by right cause, good works, nationality	Experience, personal touch, mystical encounter	Law & Gospel - God for the sake of His glory
Consequence for Adherents	Hypocritical arrogance or desperation	Syncretism, license to sin, idolatry	Nationalism, cultural wars, & Constantinianism	Passivity, ignorance of neighbor	Abandoned lives of risk & gain
Consequence for hearers	Condemnation & angry response	False security, idolatry	Division, fighting, anger	Ambiguity without contact	Life or death,

For further reading:

- [The Open Secret](#) by Lesslie Newbigin
- [The Gospel in a Pluralist Society](#) by Lesslie Newbigin
- [The Celtic Way of Evangelism](#) by George Hunter
- [The Missional Church](#) by George Hunsberger
- [The Church Between Gospel and Culture](#) by George Hunsberger
- [Resident Aliens](#) by Stanley Hauerwas
- [Radical Reformation](#) by Mark Driscoll

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