

FACING THE CULTURAL CHALLENGE

By Barry L. Davis

Anyone who serves in any ministry capacity understands that there is a huge challenge that we are faced with as we reach out to this and coming generations with the gospel of Jesus Christ. What is the challenge? ***We must minister to our culture without compromising our message.*** We face the same challenge that missionaries on foreign fields have faced for years – the need to reach people groups that do not speak the same language that we do, do not share our value system, and do not accept God's Word as the authority for their lives. The foreigners of whom I speak are in reality not foreigners at all, but natives of this and other civilized countries that have not yet been reached with the grace centered message of the Christ. Briefly, let me state four ways that we can answer the challenge before us:

1) We Must Obtain a Biblical Worldview

A worldview is quite simply the lenses through which we see our world. Whether you realize it or not, we all have a worldview. What we need to do is make sure that our worldview is in line with the Bible's.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28).

If we are going to see people through Jesus' eyes, if we are to have His worldview, we will not base our feelings and attitudes on a person's skin color, their nationality, their language, or their social status. We are not concerned initially with their acceptance or non-acceptance of God's Word as truth. We cannot attempt to categorize people into areas of personal preference and only focus on them, but set our sights on reaching all kinds of people, including those who despise us as Christians. We will love everyone as God's special creation.

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people. (Revelation 14:6)

The gospel is for all people at all times. Not only do we love these people as God's children, we embrace them as equals. Whether they look like us, sound like us, or even repudiate our message, it does not change the fact that they have the same need that all of us have – that of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

2) We Must Embrace New Methodologies

The Pharisees approached Jesus and wondered why His disciples weren't fasting (why they weren't keeping the Law). Jesus responded in Mark 2:21-22:

"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."

These two brief parables of the old garment and old wineskins illustrate the incompatibility of the old system of Jewish law and tradition with the new cloth and new wine of the gospel of Christ. Jesus was always being questioned about the different methods He used. Jesus embraced what was new and effective for ministry. Jesus was the Master of presenting truth in the language of His culture. He used objects, seeds, soil, situational parables, coins, camels, fig trees – all things that his audiences could readily identify with. And much of the methodology we must employ will do the same thing – whether it be drama, video, art, music, or stories, they need to be used to present the gospel in ways that our culture can identify with.

3) We Must Be Creative in Worship

Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. (Psalms 149:1)

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. (Rev. 5:9)

God wants His church to sing a "new song" – He wants us to creatively worship Him in our assemblies. This in no way means that we cannot continue praising God with the grand old hymns, but neither does it mean we can shut out the new songs God is calling His people to sing. This is not an either/or situation, it is a both/and situation. God can and should be praised with rock and roll, hip hop, reggae, jazz, or any other music style that can be used to reach people with the gospel message. The use of instruments of praise (Psalms 150) that our culture can relate to must be employed in the ministry of the gospel. Music in and of itself is amoral. But we can take any genre and transform it into music that is offered in praise to God.

4) We Must Practice the Art of Becoming

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save

some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. - 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

To follow Paul's example is not easy – in fact, it does not come naturally, it only comes supernaturally. We can only adapt to, and minister to our culture, when we make an absolute commitment to it as did Paul. I am not talking about compromising biblical truth, but being flexible in our approach to both evangelism and ministry.

In 1865 an editorial in the Boston Post read, "Well-informed people know it is impossible to transmit their voices over wires, and even if it were possible, the thing would not have practical value." In 1897 Lord Kelvin said, "Radio has no future." Thomas Watson, Chairman of IBM in 1943 said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers." Ken Olson, President of Digital Equipment Corporation stated in 1977, "There is no reason why anyone would want a computer in their home."

While I'm sure these were all fine men, they were not visionaries and they did not understand the changes that were to come to their world. As the church and individual Christians, let us not make the same mistake that they did. Our culture is radically changing before our very eyes, let's be ready for it, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.