

I. Introduction.

- A. Our mission is to build a community of gospel-centered people (disciples) as we:
1. Worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24; Acts 2:42).
 2. Serve one another by exercising our spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12:4-6; Eph. 4:11-16).
 3. Proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world (Mt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).
 4. Live out a biblical worldview in all spheres of life (Jer. 29:7; Mt. 5:13-16).
- B. This fourth subject is the broadest and the most controversial.

II. How are God's people to interact with the world?

- A. God's people have had various relationships with culture throughout biblical history.
1. Prior to the Exodus, God's people lived amidst the nations. Genesis
 2. The Mosaic Law established Israel as a theocratic state. Exodus-II Chronicles
 3. Because of the unfaithfulness of Israel (and Judah), she lost her independence: captivity (Babylon) and oppression. Ezra-Esther, the Prophets.
 4. Under the New Covenant, the Kingdom of God is no longer national and earthly, but spiritual. Mt. 21:33-44 John 18:36 I Pe. 2:9
- B. There have been various "Christian" approaches to interacting with culture.
1. Triumphalism: We will establish God's kingdom on earth.
 2. Escapism: Because the kingdom of God is imminent we might as well disengage from worldly culture. Jer. 28:1ff 29:9ff Acts 1:6-7 Mt. 24:42 Acts 1:6-7
 3. Conformity: The church conforms to secular culture. Rom. 12:2 I Jo. 2:15-17
 4. Separatism: Because we are citizens of God's kingdom, we should have nothing to do with the secular world. II Co. 6:14f Js. 4:4 Mt. 5:13-16 29:18-20 John 17:18
 5. Engagement: We are dual citizens who are concerned both for the City of God (the church) and the City of Man (secular culture).
- C. From where in the Bible might we receive guidance as to how we are to interact with our culture? I Chron. 12:32
1. Our situation is similar to the early patriarchs living in Canaan.
 2. Our situation is very much like the exiles living in Babylon. Je. 29:1-9 I Pe. 1:1 2:11
 3. Our situation is also like that of the early church living in the Roman Empire – we live as dual citizens and should do good to all. Phil. 3:20 Co. 1:13 I Pe. 2:9 Ga. 6:10
 4. The Bible provides examples of how believers should live as citizens of earthly nations. Gen. 41 Neh. 1:11b-2:9 Dan. 2:48-49 3:16f Acts 5:29 16:37 25:11 19:38-39
- D. We should be neither utopian nor entirely pessimistic. Mt. 24:21-22,29

III. How can we seek the welfare (peace/*shalom*) of our culture? Jer. 29:5-7

- A. Seek the spiritual well-being our our culture.
1. Proclaim the gospel. Mt. 28:18-20 Acts 1:8
 2. Live an attractive, holy, and loving life in the world. I Pe. 2:11-12 3:15
 3. Pray for our nation and its leaders. Jer. 29:7b I Tim. 2:1-4 Ez. 6:10 Pr. 21
- B. Live biblically in your vocation. Jer. 29:5 Eph. 6:5-8 I Pe. 2:18-20
1. Promote the economic prosperity (welfare) of the nation by being productive.
 2. Work hard and work smart (develop valuable vocational skills). Prov. 10:4 22:29
 3. Work to the glory of God. Eph. 6:6-8 I Pe. 2:12,18-20 Ex. 20:8-11 Gen. 2:2,15

- C. Live biblically in your home. Jer. 29:6 I Pe. 3:1-7 Eph. 5:22-6:3 Deut. 6:4ff
 - 1. The health of families will affect the well-being of a culture.
 - 2. Get married, according to God's design, and fulfill your biblical roles in marriage. Gen. 2:18-25 Eph. 5:22-33 I Pe. 3:1-7
 - 3. Have children and raise them biblically. Ps. 127:1ff Gen. 1:28 Pr. 22:6 Eph. 6:1-3
- D. Be a good citizen. Jer. 29:7 Luke 20:25 I Pe. 2:13-17
 - 1. Obey the laws of the land. I Pe. 2:13ff Ro. 13:1ff Titus 3:1 Ecc. 10:20 Acts 5:29
 - 2. Use your rights as a citizen to promote righteousness. Pr. 11:14 Dan. 4:27
- E. Do good to all people. Jer. 29:7 Gal. 6:10 Pr. 14:31 Mt. 22:29
 - 1. Christians should be the best neighbors. Luke 10:29ff
 - 2. Christians should take interest in the needs of the community.
- F. Christians can make a positive impact on every aspect of culture.

IV. What is the role of the church, as an institution, in blessing the community?

- A. The question of the role of the church in culture is very controversial.
 - 1. First we need to define what *we* mean by "church" – independent local churches.
 - 2. Some expect churches to directly engage with culture in various significant ways: benevolence, the arts, schools, hospital, politics, etc.
 - 3. Others would say that while individual Christians should engage with culture, the role of the church as an institution is much more limited. I Co. 2:2
 - 4. The church needs to focus upon the tasks to which the church is explicitly called. John 4:24 Acts 1:8 2:42ff I Co. 12:4-6 Eph. 4:11-16 Mt. 28:18-20
 - 5. We don't want to repeat the past failure of the social gospel. Mt. 16
- B. Is there a place for the local church, as an institution, to meet community needs?
 - 1. Biblical priorities for Christians in showing benevolence.
 - a. First we are responsible to care for our own families. I Ti. 5:4,8 II Th. 3:10
 - b. Then we are to be concerned for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Ga. 6:10b,2 Acts 2:44 4:32ff 6:1ff Js. 2:15-17 I Jo. 3:17-19
 - c. Then we are to be concerned for the broader community. Gal. 6:10a
 - 2. How far can and should we go in meeting non-gospel community needs?
 - 3. Should churches sponsor community programs which have an evangelistic purpose?
 - 4. It is ever appropriate to use church resources to promote community welfare in a non-evangelistic context?
 - 5. Or is it best for these beneficial works to be done by Christians through other institutions, but outside the sphere of the church as an institution?
 - 6. The lines of division between spheres are not always clear cut and easily agreed.
- C. Christians differ on strategy and emphasis for our engagement with culture.
- D. There is widespread agreement that:
 - 1. Christians should be engaged in culture for good. Jer. 29:7
 - 2. Part of the ministry of the church is to equip and encourage Christians to think and live biblically in all other spheres within culture. Eph. 5:22ff I Pe. 2:12ff

V. Conclusion.

- A. Christ is Lord of all – your family, your vocation, your citizenship, etc.
- B. We yearn for the day when the world's culture will end and Christ will establish His perfect kingdom forever. Phil. 3:20-21 Jer. 29:10-14 23:5-6

Discussion questions

1. Should we expect to be able to redeem our culture for Christ? Why or why not?
2. Because culture is corrupt should we just withdraw? Why or why not?
3. What would you say to someone who says that we shouldn't bother to engage in the world because Jesus is coming soon?
4. What biblical situations serve as examples of how we are to interact with culture?
5. In what ways can Christians contribute to the welfare (peace/*shalom*) of our culture through our vocations and our family lives?
6. How can Christians exhibit good citizenship?
7. How have Christians had a positive impact on culture through benevolence, the arts, journalism, science, education, and humanitarianism?
8. In what ways do you plan to have a positive impact on culture?
9. What is the role of the local church in blessing the community?
10. What would you say to someone who says that the church is responsible for poverty and racism in our community?
11. What else would you like to see our church do in the community?