

The Bad News and The Good News

Matthew 5.13-16; 1 Peter 5.6-12

Our culture is becoming increasingly hostile to the God and the church of Jesus Christ. Biblical truths are attacked in government and media. Our world is showing its ‘true colors’: It’s bad, but there’s good news, too. As salt and light, Christians point to a better way, and a better day!

Christian Civics 101: Biblical Truths for Life

- Christians hold to absolute truth in a culture without truth.
- Christians honor God as the Sovereign over all nations.
- Christians are ‘aliens’ in this world, ambassadors for Christ.
- Christians submit to civil government whenever possible.
- Christians obey God and not man when government is evil.
- Christians do good, even when suffering persecution.

The Bad News: This World is Evil and Doomed

- We are living in ‘lawless last days’ (2 Timothy 3.1-4)
- Jesus says it will get worse for His followers (Jn. 15.18-21; 6.2)
- Peter foretells this world’s final demise (2 Peter 3.10-13)

The Good News: There’s a New World Coming

- We tell people they can be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5.20)
- We are the ‘fragrance of Christ’ in the world (2 Cor 2.15-16a)
- Be ‘salt and light’: Stand firm, and share Christ!



1. The most difficult step in living our lives for God is moving from knowledge to action. We’ve unpacked biblical truth about God, culture, and governments. Now it’s time to *act*. Let’s begin with the single issue which defines evil in our culture: Abortion. We’re talking about *children*, not just *potential* children; taking human life is committing what? Since the unborn cannot speak for themselves, what is our *responsibility* to them (Prov. 31.8-9)? What can we do financially? (*Options for Life!*) Politically? (**Only** vote for someone who opposes abortion, and don’t fall for “I’m personally against abortion, but support a woman’s choice.” That’s like saying, “I’m personally against murder, but support your right to kill.”) What are other ways we can oppose abortion and defend the gift of life?
2. The advance of evil today is evidenced in increasing collaboration between government, education, business, entertainment, and the media. Public schools teach LGBTQ views in kindergarten through high school. A documentary on conservative Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is censored by Amazon, along with a book about the damaging effects of transgenderism. The federal government is seeking to pass a bill mandating LGBTQ and abortion practices. In this environment, what does it mean for a Christian to ‘obey God rather than men’ (Acts 5.29)? Think about how you will do this.
3. In the final analysis, the cultural and moral demise we see today is not political, it is spiritual. It is an effort by humans to replace God as final authority. Do you see any similarity to Babel (Gen 11.4)? We may be able to win some philosophical or political arguments, but only one thing will change *hearts* – and that is the gospel. In a post-Truth age, the only absolute solution to Satan’s evil rule is for a person to encounter the Author of Truth. We must share that *the wages of sin is death, but the Gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Rom. 6.23). Without the gospel, nothing changes. With the gospel, everything changes. Who will you share the life-changing gospel with *this week*?

To set the stage for this morning, I'd like to read from two passages in the NT, first from Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5.13-16, then from the Apostle Peter's first epistle, 1 Peter 5.6-12. This is our final message in the series called 'How Should We *Now* Live.'

Matthew 5.13-16

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Peter, writing to first-century Christians who were facing persecution, ended his epistle with this timeless advice:

1 Peter 5.6-12

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!

The **Bad News** is that we are watching the progressive transformation of our culture becoming hostile to the Church and to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is evidenced in the social and spiritual fabric of our society. Christian moral values have been eviscerated in theory and evacuated in practice. The political landscape is also in free fall as we are watching what Barack Obama called "the fundamental transformation of America." As G.K. Chesterton observed in *The Everlasting Man* in 1925: "If there is one fact we really can prove,

from the history that we really do know, it is that despotism can be a development, often a late development and very often indeed the end of societies that have been highly democratic. A despotism may almost be defined as a tired democracy."

The fact is, we live in a Republic form of government, delegated authority. The danger is that those to whom we have delegated authority can become an independent, self-absorbed ruling class. This danger is exacerbated in that they are no longer guided or governed by a Christian moral value system. There is no fear of God in them.

However, there is **Good News**. It is this: The expression and expanse of Christianity have never been extinguished by an environment of immorality and persecution.. (Meditate on 2 Corinthians 4.) The culture of this world – no matter how good it is – still contains the seeds of depravity. It is inescapable: *The whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5.19b)*. A sinful world is always in conflict with Christ, but the church has always challenged the culture. We must do so today. We must provide a faithful presence.

"For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life." 2 Cor 2:15-16 Our lives and our words are a reminder to the saved and the unsaved of their final destiny. Christians love this 'aroma' of 'life to life' – reminding us of our new life in Christ, and our eternal life in heaven. Conversely, unbelievers hate the 'aroma' of 'death to death;' they do not want to be reminded that they are spiritually dead, and perishing. (see Jack Wyrzten story below) As a result, we can expect them to oppose the gospel and Christians.

How will you be that sweet aroma to a lost and dying world?
(see Fred Chay, revised)

Jack Wyrzten, founder of Word of Life, tells of an encounter he had with the famous atheist Madeline Murray O'Hare on the old Jack Eigan radio show. Few people today remember that Jack Eigan had an enormously popular late-night radio program across America for 20 years, from 1951 to 1971, running from 11:15 pm to 12:30 am ET on

WCFL out of Chicago. Jack Eigan was abrasive and irritating, which is why so many people tuned in. He would talk to anyone. One night he had Madeline Murray O'Hare on with Jack Wyrzten. Wyrzten was an evangelist, so he began explaining to Madeline Murray O'Hare that God loved her even though she was a sinner, Jesus died on the cross for her sin, but if she didn't believe in Jesus she would spend eternity in the judgment of hell. When he mentioned judgment, O'Hare lashed out at him: "Talk to me about God's love if you want, but don't talk to me about God's judgment. I don't want to hear about that."

1 Peter 5.6-12 – Suffering, but God's provision, and an exhortation to 'stand strong!'

Matthew 5.13-16 – Be salt and light

I would encourage any Christian who wants to know how Satan is attacking and undermining Christians and the gospel in America today to listen to Alisa Childers' podcast. Recently, she interviewed journalist and historian Rod Dreher, author of one of the most important books I've read besides the Bible, *Live Not By Lies*. With decades of experience traveling and speaking with those who have lived under totalitarian governments (Communism), Dreher has keen insight into how our society today is moving in that direction.

She asked him to define totalitarianism. I expected him to say something about communist dictators, military coups, or violent rioters. Instead, he said this: *Totalitarianism is a system in which everything is politicized, where you cannot escape politics*. Suddenly the lights went on in my brain. We are living in a day in which everything is being politicized: *How big a cup of soft drink can you buy? What kind of straw should you drink it with? What kind of light bulb can we buy? What races or genders are oppressed and what races and genders are the oppressors? Who can get married to whom? How many children can you have? Is killing a baby in the womb right or not? Who decides the gender of my child? What theories of the origin of life and the universe can be taught in schools? What social and political views are allowed on university campuses? (The list is endless.)*

It is a cardinal rule for pastors that 'politics and the pulpit don't mix.' That is always true, *unless and only until politicians step over a line and encroach into an area in which they have no authority*. God is a higher authority than any politician or judge. When God speaks to the issues of life, and a political authority enacts laws which oppose God's truth, it is the privilege and responsibility (Ezek. 3, 33) of a pastor to speak the truth, and listen, to face the consequences.

Biblical history is replete with examples...

Secular history is replete with examples...

Modern history is replete with examples...

When a pastor shared the gospel with a Nepali family, they eagerly placed their faith in Christ and began attending church regularly, walking eight miles each way to attend. But when the owner of the land they leased learned of their newfound faith in Christ, he kicked them off the land. As an extremely poor family struggling to survive, they had leased the land both to live on and to farm, giving half their crops to their landlord in payment. In addition to being evicted from the land, they were denied access to the village water tap.

VOM helped the family with the construction of a water well, and, though isolated and rejected, their faith has blossomed and grown. "The Christian life is like a rose that blooms and spreads aroma in the midst of a thousand thorns," the family told their pastor.

Our persecuted brothers and sisters in Nepal face great pressure from their communities to reject Christ or suffer the consequences. In recent years, the government has criminalized conversion to Christianity and declared that those who change their religion should be expelled from the country. Christians in Nepal face harassment and even beatings from Hindu nationalists who envision Nepal becoming a "pure" Hindu nation.

"A Ship In Harbor Is Safe, But That Is Not What Ships Are Built For"

The 'Ship' of the Church

The church is like a ship sailing in a culture that is like a raging sea. We departed safe harbor long ago. We are facing waves of new laws that make God and His truth illegal, and pronounce that those who speak God's truth are dangerous. Christians who dare to proclaim God's truth today are declared "cancelled."

But listen: The church was never meant to be safe and secure in the harbor. Christ commissioned us to 'go into all the world and preach the gospel, and make disciples.' Our calling is to brave uncharted waters in pursuit of those who need to be saved.

I love the scene at the end of the old movie *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Captain Jack Sparrow has somehow outsmarted all his foes, is back on board his ship the *Black Pearl*. He gazes off into the distance and says, "Bring me that horizon."

The 'horizon' of our lives, if you will, is after this life is over, and we are with our Savior forever. How should we now live? With *that* horizon in view. Live now for eternity.

Now is the time to deepen your study of the Bible.
Now is the time to develop your fellowship with Jesus.
Now is the time to depend on the Holy Spirit as you live in an unholy world.

Serving Him with you
until He comes for us,
Fred

A pastor in Oregon recently wrote me: "How do I convince a Millennial...that sex is immutable, that socialism is evil, that character matters more than skin color? In a post-Truth age, arguing with words doesn't work. So what works? The only solution is for that person to encounter the Author of Truth. The best way to explain that men are not women, amazingly enough, is to explain that *the wages of sin is death, but the Gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Without the gospel, nothing changes. With the gospel, everything changes.

We don't usually think of the Apostle Paul as a prophet, but he wrote a lot about the end times in which we live. One passage is 2 Tim. 3.1-4:

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...

I challenge you to find anything in that list that does not describe our nation to a 'T'!

But times are going to get worse. Listen to Jesus' warning to His disciples the night before His crucifixion:

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world...the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you... But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me... They will make you outcasts... but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God."
(John 15.18-21; 6.2)

[See also Matthew 24.9-12): "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold."]



2 Peter 3.10-13

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

2 Corinthians 5.20

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg on behalf of Christ, “Be reconciled to God!”

2 Corinthians 2.15-16a

For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.