

March 22, 2017



feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)

Dear family,

On Sunday, I was arguing that you cannot deal Christianly with present culture unless you do so from the perspective of our future heavenly culture. For many believers, it is one thing to find a way to think biblically about the issues we are facing and address them; it is another to avoid the process of personal and communal accommodation, leading to assimilation, where we are the ones being shaped by culture, not shaping it. Richard Niebuhr spoke of a professing church that would end up presenting "a God without wrath bringing men without sins into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross." There is a big difference between being culturalized, in the sense that you understand present cultural issues, and are informed and engaged as a Christian, with a Christian mind, and being enculturated, essentially marked and influenced more by culture than by Christ.

Faith has been deemed increasingly irrelevant as a result of a process that we call secularization, and a religion that we call the philosophy of secularism. The dynamics of rationalization, reason replacing revelation, are the order of the day. Sadly, we have witnessed an evangelical community, whatever that term means now, that has functioned for decades without a Christian mind and consequently become increasingly this-world minded, or just plain worldly. For all the sadness and danger of our culture wars and societal breakdowns, the dismantling of the fusion between Christianity and Americanism is to be welcomed. America, the Republican Party and Capitalism are not the holy trinity of the kingdom of God. Continuing to hide behind the excuses that always blame the adversarial nastiness of the liberal media (and it is nasty!) will not do if we are to engage our culture effectively. Guinness writes: "*Failing to think Christianly, evangelicals have been forced into the role of cultural imitators and adapters rather than originators. In biblical terms it is to be worldly...*" Add to that a charismatic and Pentecostal community that sadly put apart what God intended to function together, namely spirit and mind. The consequent anti-intellectualism was just another form of worldliness. As John Stott put it: "To denigrate the mind is to undermine foundational Christian doctrines."

We must heed Paul's injunction to the Romans, not to be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our mind. To love the world is a blatant denial of the life that is in us, and is a commitment to what has a shelf life and is passing away. C.S. Lewis once said: "A man should never give all his heart to anything which will end when his life ends." I just mentioned mortality – hold that thought. At a time when we are seeking as Christians to think carefully and prayerfully about matters related to present culture, Lewis' statement is important. It has been the teaching of the saints throughout history that the essence of worldliness is simply living as if this world and its culture is all that there is. So, at a time when we are considering how our faith relates to present culture, it would be wise to acknowledge that the relation between this world and the next is arguably more important than only understanding how we relate to this world. The epistles address the question of our responses to challenging cultural issues. Paul thinks rightly about these circumstances and gives the reason why we should not lose heart amidst such opposition and cultural decline. "Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence." What's the link here? He is drawing attention to one of the great evidences of unspiritual this-worldliness, that lives and functions as if this life is the real thing, and the life to come is ethereal and ephemeral and abstract. We treat present life as if it is so material and substantial but in fact it is the shadowlands. We are the ones who appear to the angelic hosts as unreal and vaporous and incomplete. A final word from Lewis again: "If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this."

This was how I was trying to set-up my meditation that had relevance to how faith relates to present culture, that related to Bo's series on judgment, and that related to Lent, that includes mortality on its curriculum.

- For a Christian, our considerations of present temporal culture must be made in the light of what is yet to come that is eternal.
- That future raises the issues of judgment.
- Lent begins with a consideration of mortality and the next life as well as a consideration of judgment against sin.
- Easter is the celebration of the triumph of the eternal over the temporal, of life over death, of an eternal future when death too shall die.

Now you can download the message!

Maranatha,
Stuart