

# **The Glory of God in the Gospel of God, Reading the Cultural Texts Around Us,** Selected Text, Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2008

*“The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. He replied, ‘When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.”*

**Matthew 16:1-3**

## **Intro:**

Last week we took a look at how culture can shape the gospel. While it is inevitable that language and perspective will shape the gospel to some extent, and it is therefore “impure,” it is not impotent and indefinable, as many scholars want us to believe. The reality is clear of God’s redemptive story, and the only path to redemption, and a relationship with the creator of the universe. Because culture has a shaping power, many Christians are fearful of it and decide to refrain from participating in it. The result is a hybrid Christian ghetto that remains impotent in spite of Christendom’s belief that they are reaching millions. Christianity’s influence is waning in the wake of a dying western church, which disengaged from the American culture during the rise of rationalism in the west. Churches abandoned universities (creating their own), then the rising pop cultural pulpits (multi-media), and were then relegated to a marginalized corner of the cultural voice. Finding itself powerless, the evangelical church has been spending more lobbying dollars to regain its perceived power base, thinking it can change the world through the power mechanisms of the world, instead of through the power of the gospel contextualized to a changing world.

Today I want us to take a look at that! How does the gospel best move into a culture? Is it through power and influence, or is it through an informed band of believers living out their life on every level of human culture? How can we be involved with culture and engage it intelligently, without falling into the mechanisms and world systems that ultimately destroy it? How does the gospel story intersect the human one? Only by reading the culture, can we answer that question. Paul does an admirable job of this in Acts 17. We’re going to take a look at that, and then finish with some key reasons to read our pop culture, and engage it with love, humility and boldness!

## **From the Head...**

### **1. Why Read Pop Culture?**

#### **Defend**

*“I think with movies we can begin to strengthen people’s immune systems, because people go into the movies with their defenses down. It’s not real, therefore not threatening. When they least expect it, that might be the best time for the **guerillas of art** to get in there and move the head and the heart”*

**Oliver Stone**

*“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”*

**Colossians 2:8**

*“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”*

**2 Corinthians 10:5**

#### **Learn**

*“Whenever we meet heathen writers, let us learn from the light of truth which is admirably displayed in their works, that the human mind, fallen as it is, and corrupted from its integrity, is yet invested and adorned by God with excellent talents. If we believe that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth itself, we shall not reject or despise the truth itself, wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to insult the Spirit of God.”*

**John Calvin**

*“Tillich speaks of the “Latent” Church in secular culture and acknowledges its prophetic voice in challenging and even correcting distorted beliefs and practices in the church.”*

**Kevin Vanhooser**

#### **Challenge and Change**

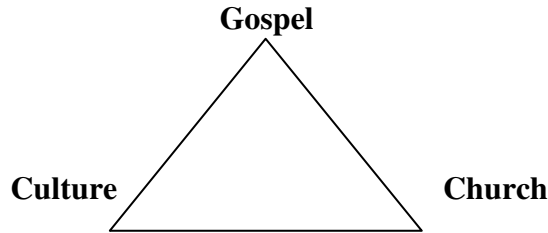
*“Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”*

**Karl Marx**

### **Is it congruent with the mission of the church? How are you participating in God’s building project?**

*“The church’s mission is to communicate, be oriented to, reproduce, and cultivate the reality of what God is doing in Christ through the Spirit for the sake of the world.”*

## Newbigin's Gauntlet? The Church's Relationship to the Culture



### 4 Doctrines of the Theology of Contact + the Holy Spirit

*"Reading culture theologically requires us to move beyond the assumption that the church is 'the only' location in which the Holy Spirit is Operative."*  
**Stanley Grenz**

1. Incarnation (**John 1**; the "Logos") "Subversive Text" → Using the cultural text to subvert its meaning
2. Common Grace (**Matthew 4, Acts 10, 16**)
3. General Revelation (**Psalms 19; Romans 1**)
4. Imago Dei (**Genesis 1:26-27**)

How we view culture will ultimately determine how well we affect culture!

- Battlefield
- Classroom
- Sanctuary
- Place to serve

### 2. How Can We Best Understand Culture?

*"The best way to understand a particular culture or even an epoch is to discover its greatest anxiety (The focus of a negative concern) and its greatest hope (The focus of its ultimate concern)."*  
**Paul Tillich**

*"The first way in which a new generation takes control of society is through the culture; the arts, films, books, music, through all entertainment. People who feel safe and secure in existing society are frightened by ideas that threaten their power. People who hold the power in society want nice complacent forms of entertainment, films that comfort people and support the status quo."*  
**Chuck Palahniuk**

### 3. How Can We Read the Culture?

1. Approach the culture with humility
2. Determine the "Worldview" or "Root Metaphor" behind the text
3. Learn your own culture well
4. Do not judge the text before you read it
5. Refrain from a "Reductionist" approach to the text
6. Discern the faith commitments the text portrays
7. Determine the hopes and anxieties the text portrays
8. Find the text's "Redemptive" plan
9. Ask how the gospel intersects this text

### ...to the Heart

When we are *"transformed by the renewing of our mind"* (**Romans 12:2**), we are transformed in every area of our thinking. Unfortunately, many of us have become lazy believers. We make excuses that we are too busy. We're too busy to know what we believe and why we believe it, and then we lose touch with our surroundings because we "just don't have the time."

We have been looking at the GLORY of God in the Gospel of God, which should jog our hearts to remember how much we have been forgiven, and how great our God is. It is because of this that we are "sent," like Christ, into this world to proclaim this glory, and be missionaries and worshippers in this "alien" land. In order to be missionaries, we need to be aware of the culture, so we can understand it and challenge it with the hope of the gospel and the glory of Christ to ALL nations! It's heart check time. Who loves you, and who do you love?