

Cross & Spire

Newsletter of First Baptist Church

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June 2022 Volume 39, No. 6



A Word from Pastor Rick

It is becoming increasingly uncomfortable for people who live by traditional values and outlooks in our society. This is especially true for Bible believing Christians. It isn't just that faith in God and the Bible or traditional values aren't fashionable. Now they are considered by many as harmful and hateful. To say things that were completely non controversial ten years ago, like a man is a man and a woman is a woman is now hate speech. To say that traditional marriage is good for society is also considered hateful. It is not just that these sorts of things are fashionable. There are people who sincerely believe that imposing these views through government and passing them on to young children is their moral duty. They also think that parents should not have a say in this. There are increasing numbers of people who think speech should be controlled to accomplish social good. By this they mean that people who say the sorts of "hateful" things I have listed should be silenced. I actually long for the days when I was a hater only when I tried to persuade someone that the Bible is true. The change has been so rapid that it is bewildering. It feels like I need to walk around guarding every word so that I don't get rebuked, or canceled, or fired, or doxed or whatever other retribution our modern society invents to punish those who are out of line. Uncomfortable may be too mild a description.

Ever since Constantine used Christianity to unite the Roman Empire the Christian World View was the central uniting outlook of Western Civilization and Christians were therefore at the center of the culture. The covenant view of life was the way people calibrated their lives. They believed there was a God who expressed his will in Scripture and that living by his will brought success, and disobedience to that will led to God's active judgment. Even secular people believed that there was moral truth outside of themselves; and that if we lived by it our lives would be better. Morality generally followed Christian teaching.

In Europe Christianity was established as the official state religion. In the United States our constitution forbade such establishment, but Evangelical Christianity was the unofficially established faith of the land until around the 1990s. Christians were not just accepted, they were considered upstanding, virtuous citizens. If you are my age you remember successive presidents inviting Billy Graham, (a famous Bible preaching evangelist), to the White house to cultivate the "evangelical vote;" and Bill Clinton carrying a Bible with big gold letters on the cover during the Monica Lewinski scandal. That's all gone now. Christians are now on the outside.

It is this situation that is behind the so called culture war: a battle between traditional and progressive values. Each side wants the levers of political power to impose their vision for society or preserve their rights. To many Christians the situation constitutes a call from God to arms to "win our country back." So they push conservative candidates and put hope in political action. I have listened to friends who have said that political candidates are sent by God to save the country. I want to be clear. I think nothing would be better for the US or any country than embracing faith in God and obedience to the ten commandments. I am also grateful for the many boldly articulated defenses for traditional values and Christian truth; and for political and social action to oppose imposing ideological agendas that are counter to Christian morality or common sense. My problem is with the tools and the aims of the culture war. Often when Christians talk about it, it sounds to me like they want to regain their standing in society; instead of persuading people to embrace Jesus for their own sake, or working to do good for others just because we love them.

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If you read the New Testament you will see that it was considered axiomatic that God's people were on the fringes of culture and radically different in their outlook and behavior. Jesus defined his followers identity and role by contrasting them with the world in which they lived. They were salt in a world given to rot and corruption and their role depended on their maintaining their distinctive outlook and behavior. They were light in darkness. They were to be fully engaged in culture, but to stay counter cultural by radical obedience to Jesus. Jesus taught us to accept the opposition to our lifestyle and faith with joy (Matthew 5:11-12; Luke 6:22-23; John 15:18-16:11). He taught us to love our enemies. When he said, "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two," this was a real possibility. Roman soldiers could demand service from private people to carry stuff. Jesus said the sorts of things he said about loving enemies to people who were cruelly oppressed by their Roman overlords. These people also thought it their duty to God to rise in arms against this at the right time. Instead Jesus followers were to be sold out to his kingdom, but radically committed to the way peace making, love and persuasion in advancing it.

You can see this outlook reflected in the letters of the New Testament: "Let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of these things the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. Therefore do not become partakers with them. For you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as Children of light....," "You are blameless and pure children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold fast the Word of life," "Walk in wisdom toward those who are **outside**, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech be full of grace, seasoned with salt so that you know how you should answer each one."

The writer of Hebrews held up Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's situation as aliens in the land as model for us in the world: "These all died in faith, not receiving the promises, instead seeing them from a distance they welcomed them, confessing that they were strangers and aliens upon the earth. For those saying such things show that they are

seeking a homeland....a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God." Peter actually called the Christians in Pontus (a Roman province), "chosen **aliens of the diaspora**." He then said their status was first, "according to the foreknowledge of God." This means that God knew who they were and knew their role, and their gifts, and their situation ahead of time. With all of that in mind God chose them to live as aliens in that place and time for his purpose. The obvious implication is that they were qualified for it and God knew it. Then he said they were chosen aliens, "according to the sanctification of the Spirit." This means they were set apart by the Holy Spirit for this role. When you read the letter, you find this includes active opposition and persecution. They were to live to, "declare the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." This meant they must, "have good conduct among the Gentiles in order that when they slander you as evil doers because they see your good deeds they will glorify God on the day of visitation." They were specifically told "not to pay back evil for evil or insult for insult instead, bless them...." "If you suffer for the sake of righteousness you are blessed...sanctify Christ as Lord in you hearts always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you for an account of the hope that is in you. But do this with gentleness and respect. Hold on to a good conscience in order that when they mistreat you and slander your good conduct in Christ they might be ashamed."

In summary living for the kingdom of God means accepting our alien status and living for a kingdom that will not be established in this world until Jesus returns. It means living by God's will in a world that sees it as folly or worse. It means loving those who despise us without expecting anything from them. It means bearing witness to the truth by word and deed with gentleness and respect for others, when they treat us with harshness and arrogance.

The irony here is that the early Church embraced this way. Read any history of the Church and you will see that the historian describes an almost miraculous growth of the movement. They all say that the growth happened because of: 1. love for one another and for those outside the Church; 2. steadfastness when persecuted, including love

for their tormentors, even when tortured and killed; 3. living what they preached. Mouth to mouth, and life to life the Gospel spread and changed lives one person at a time until a wily politician, Constantine, saw an opportunity to unite his diverse empire using the Church. Christians became central and slowly lost their distinctiveness and began identifying the world with the kingdom of God. I am grateful for the legacy of western civilization including the American Republic; but this is not the kingdom of God. I need to vote and act as a responsible citizen. The Gospel needs to inform these, but saving the country is not my calling.

We must embrace our alien status, live our distinct lifestyle and proclaim our alien message with unwavering love for those in the world. We must do this with no other aim than the honor of Christ and the good of our neighbor. Who knows it may bring a revival that will yet lead to a renaissance of the best of our Republic; but that is not our concern. We are salt and light in an alien world and we live to declare the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light while loving our neighbors as ourselves. Your Partner in the Great Work,
Rick Pinilla

SUMMER BAZAAR COMING SOON!

What: Outdoor Summer Bazaar and Barbeque.

Where: The parking lot of Montessori School on School Street, Lebanon.

When: July 23th 9-3pm

Why: Fundraiser to support First Baptist Church building.

How you can help make this a success....

Items needed: camping equipment, furniture, toys, wall art, lamps, household goods, small electronics, decorative items, etc.

We are not going to sell crafts or jewelry, we will save that for the Christmas Bazaar!

Items NOT needed: large electronics, clothes, shoes, coffee mugs glasses silverware, workout equipment.

* All donations must be clean and in good working condition. Any questions you may have about specific donations please call Terry Bolduc at 603-632-5168.

Starting in mid June I will be posting dates for dropping off items so that we can start pricing.

Thank you for your support!
Terry Bolduc

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRIES UPDATES

Please join us on Sunday, June 5th during Worship as we honor our graduates and our children with acknowledgement of their hard work, and a gift.

Through June, July, & August, Children's Church will be a more relaxed setting. We will provide a short Bible lesson or video and do a craft, game, or some other fun activity. This will provide a summer vacation feel to our weekly children's ministry.

Be on the lookout for more information on these 2 events:

In August, we will be holding a Community Family Fun day for an end of summer celebration before school starts back up. This will be a fun evening of carnival games and fellowship.

We will be hosting our Fall Festival again in October. Join us for pumpkin carving, face painting, and games.

CAMP SCHOLARSHIP UPDATE

Upon further reflection of our Camp Scholarship Program, the Children and Youth Ministry Team has voted to increase the Scholarship per child. We will provide \$350 per child to attend a Bible based camp for one week this summer. However, if you need more assistance, please reach out to Deb Girdwood or Rachel at the office (office@lebfirstbaptist.com). We have also lifted the deadline for applications. If you have signed your child up for camp, and need assistance, we will help at any time.