

Contextualize without Compromise **Sunday Morning Message on Galatians 2:1-10**

The New South is growing.

Through urbanization and the vibrant growth of southern cities and towns, the South is becoming a center for innovative, intellectual and cultural growth, reports Advance the Church.

This will greatly impact the way we do church.

Right now the South is the fastest growing region in our nation. In the 30 year period between 1995 and 2025, according to the US Census Bureau, the South will be the most populated region in our country. For example, North Carolina will grow by 1 million.

The Hispanic population is projected to increase rapidly over the 1995 to 2025 projection period, accounting for 44 percent of the growth in the Nation's population (32 million Hispanics out of a total of 72 million persons added to the Nation's population).

"In one generation's time, there won't even be the nominal Christianity in the South that there is now. The mega-churches will flounder and people will just stop going. They are only going now because it is somewhat expected—part of the culture—or as some moral exercise" -Tim Keller

We are not only growing in numbers but in age.

The first of the Baby Boom generation (those born between 1946 and 1964) reach retirement age in 2010. The percentage of the population that is elderly will increase rapidly in the South. The South is predicted to have 32 million deaths before 2025.

The South is also growing younger. The South will see 43 million births before 2025. How will our church respond to these cultural changes?

Paul in Romans 10:14 asked this question, "How shall they hear without a preacher?" He then added in verse 17, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." From these statements, we know we must not only witness and preach the gospel, but we must witness and preach so our listeners will hear, understand, and respond.

We must communicate our message so our culture comprehends what we are saying without changing our message.

This morning we have allowed our culture to influence not what we teach and preach but how we teach and preach. I'm preaching in English not the Biblical languages of Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. I have contextualized the medium not the message.

Multinational corporations market their products according to their cultures. For example, McDonalds sell hamburgers in Malaysia. Over half of the population in Malaysia is Muslim. But the female cashiers in Malaysia behind the counter wear their little paper hats on top of their

head-coverings and they call their products “beefburgers” not hamburgers. If they call their Big Macs “hamburgers” their Muslim customers would not eat there. Has McDonalds changed their product? No! Has McDonalds changed the way they market their product? Yes! Because of their Muslim culture who is offended at eating pork. McDonalds has contextualized without compromising. <http://www.reachingandteaching.org/> by David Sills.

In Galatians, Paul is confronting a similar issue. The Jews wanted to force their Jewish regulation on Gentiles. The Jews wanted to coerce Gentile believers to be circumcised according to their Old Testament Law and culture.

How Paul responded this cultural pressure provides us with some general principles for responding to our cultural upheavals.

1. We Do Not Alter our Message to Engage our Culture.

The example Paul used was Titus who was a Gentile believers that the Judaizers wanted circumcised. Paul refused to condone works of the Law as a means of salvation. Paul refused to change the content of his gospel message (Galatians 2:1-10).

Secular anthropologists see each culture as a separate entity with its own set of morals. If a culture believes in killing the second twin, then, it is not murder. This issue is relative with each culture. There are no absolutes according to the secular anthropologist. God wrote an absolute when He commanded, “Thou shalt not kill.”

We do not change our message because it is politically incorrect to preach Jesus is the only way to heaven. Those who believe in Pluralism will call us intolerant of other religions. Even among Evangelicals, according to the *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2007 US Religious Landscape Survey*, only 36% believe their religion to be “the one, true faith that leads to eternal life.”

What about Jesus claim to be the only Son of God and also the only way to Heaven in John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, the life, no man comes unto the Father but by me.” In this arena, we are counter-cultural.

2. We Do Adapt our Methods to Engage our Culture.

A. This is what Paul did with Timothy in Acts 16. There are two differences between Titus and Timothy. Paul would not allow Gentile Titus to be circumcised by Jewish Judaizers because the issue was salvation. Paul did permit Timothy who was half Jew and half Gentile to be circumcised in order to witness to Jews. Timothy was to be circumcised because the men in his Jewish audiences were circumcised. This is called “Incarnational missions.”

J. Hudson Taylor lived among the Chinese and became one with them to win them. Without changing his message he dressed like the Chinese and cut his hair like them because he was one of them. He shaved his head except for a long pony tail. He engaged their culture without compromising his message.

If you are going to reach unsaved motorcycle gangs you don't wear a three piece suit and drive a BMW. You wear boots, leather jackets, with your wallet chained to your belt and ride a Harley.

B. Paul gave guidelines on how far we go in adapting to the culture we are seeking to reach in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. We do want we do for "the sake of the gospel." We have gone too far when the Gospel message is watered down.

1. To the Jews Paul became like their Jewish culture. This is why Paul Timothy circumcised.
2. To the Gentiles Paul became like their Gentile culture.
 - a. When Paul preached to Jews, he preached from the Old Testament.
 - b. When Paul preached to Gentiles, he did not preach from the Old Testament. In Acts 17:22-27 Paul built bridges to the pagan culture. He refers to the altar to the unknown God and told them that he was going to inform them who that unknown God was. I had a student one time who was witnessing to a Jehovah's Witness and used her Bible to prove the deity of Christ and to win her to the Lord.
3. Paul adapted to his audience without changing his message.

C. Jesus adjusted to His culture according to John 1:1, 14.

1. The Son of God not only became man but He became a Jewish man. Jesus was circumcised, attended the synagogue, ate Kosher food, and keep the Sabbath. He perfectly kept the Law.
2. Jesus adjusted to his culture without compromising His message. It was because of His claims to be the Messiah and God that His Jewish culture perfectly understood. They just disagreed and crucified Him as a false prophet.
3. Jesus was also criticized for going too far in His associations with sinners. Jesus was accused of being a glutton and binge drinker (Matthew 11:19). Martin Luther said if you are never accused of antinomianism you are not preaching the gospel.
4. Engaging can go too far and lead to syncretism. King Solomon in his exposure to the surrounding cultures, succumbed and added the gods of the pagan cultures to Israel's religion.

From the SBC International Mission Broad (IMB) Principles of Contextualization says "The theological construct represented by the term "Allah" in the Quranic system is deficient and unacceptable. However, the primary issue is not the term. The same name is used by devout Christians and it represents a sound, scriptural view of God. In fact, historically, the Christian use of "Allah" predates the rise of Islam. The missionary task is to teach who "Allah" truly is in accord with biblical revelation."

Another example is provided by John Hammett. "Phil Parshall, one of the leading advocates of contextualizing the church in Islamic culture, has recently written of the danger of contextualization crossing a line and becoming syncretism, a harmful blending of Christianity with other teachings. He examines the strategy of a Christian missionary joining a Muslim mosque for the purpose of becoming a Muslim to reach Muslims, and concludes that the practice

is open to the charge of unethical and sub-Christian activity” (John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005, 345).

3. We Cannot Allow Moralism to Limit our Methods.

A. Peter had contextualized in Antioch and was eating Boganles’ Country Ham Biscuits with the Gentile believers.

B. When the Legalists from Jerusalem came, Peter gave up his Christian liberty and ministry to the Gentiles and started eating bagels and cream cheese with the Jews. Peter who was properly engaging culture withdrew and lost his ministry. There are two extremes in engaging culture. One is go too far into syncretism. This is where many in the Emergent Church are today with its Social Gospel. The other is not to go far enough into isolationism. This is where many of our conservative churches are. Our only social involvement is condemning abortion and homosexuality.

C. Peter knew better because of his experience with Cornelius in Acts 10. But Peter caved under the pressure of his legalists. His fear of man more than God had become his snare.

D. Paul rebuked Peter for compromising the message of salvation by his actions.

- 1) Peter’s actions preached: “You must please God by your rules, not eating pork, etc. By your works.”
- 2) Paul’s message was this: “You cannot please God by what you do but by accepting what Jesus has already done in His death, burial, and resurrection.”

E. Moralism or Legalism is the enemy of the Gospel in

- 1) Justification which Paul will elaborate on in Galatians 4 and 5.
- 2) Sanctification which Paul will expand on in Galatians 6 and 7.

Conclusion. At Advance 10, Tullian Tchividjan, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, told the story of Donald Grey Barnhouse who pastored 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PA. In a sermon Barnhouse asked this question, “What would Philadelphia look like, if Satan took over? What would any city look like if Satan took complete control? Here is his answer, “All bars would be closed. There would be no drunkenness. All pornography would be banished and pristine streets would be filled with tidy pedestrians who smiled at each other. There would be no swearing and all of the children would say ‘No sir’ and ‘Yes ma’am.’ And the churches would be full every Sunday where Christ is not preached.” Most of us would be satisfied if our cities, lives and churches looked like what Barnhouse described. The moralists and legalists would be happy. So would Satan. Satan would have succeeded in convincing us that salvation is earned by our morality: what we do not do and what we do practice. Satan would also have succeeded in brainwashing Christians into thinking that a life of not breaking the rules of our particular church equaled spirituality. In Galatians 2:19 and 20, Paul tells us what is the life that pleases God. I am dead to thinking that pleasing others by keeping their rules is spirituality. I am dead to that thinking because “I am crucified with Christ.” But now I can live because I have by faith been justified i.e., been declared righteous, based on what Jesus did not what I did. But now I live as a

believer because Christ is in me and by faith in Christ who loved me and gave Himself for me I live for Him out of love for what He has done.