

Advancing the Gospel into the 21ST Century Part III: Context Sensitive

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CONTEXT SENSITIVE:

The Principle of Contextualization (Acts 16:1-5) This is the third crucial principle of ministry for the 21st (and the 1st!) century.

1. What does contextualization mean? To use this word could get me into a mine-field. Contextualization can, unfortunately, be used to mean that one's interpretation of Scripture is as valid as any other. Or, it could mean that every interpretive community has a perspective that helps us see aspects of God's self-disclosure that other communities cannot in themselves see or hear. That's better. But as a practitioner of ministry, I see contextualization is adapting my communication of the gospel without changing its essential character.

2. Examples in Acts: Acts 13:16ff and Acts 14:14-17. Examples of how Paul adapts to new cultures abound in Acts. They are literally everywhere. Even Jay Adams, fairly rock-ribbed conservative in everyway, wrote a book *Audience Adaptations in the Sermons and Speeches of Paul*. In Acts 13 we see Paul sharing the gospel in a synagogue to those who believed in the God of the Bible, and in Acts 14 we see him sharing the gospel to a pagan, blue-collar crowd. The differences and similarities are striking. **a)** His citation of authority is very different. In the first case he quotes Scripture and John the Baptist. In the second, he argues from general revelation--greatness of creation. **b)** They differ in emphasis of content. Hard to miss that with Jews and God-fearers he ignores doctrine of God and gets right to Christ; with pagans here and Acts 17, he labors the very concept of God. **c)** Finally, they differ in even the form of the final appeal--how to 'close' with Christ--is different. In Acts 13:39 Paul speaks of the law of God and says, essentially: "you think you are good, but you aren't good enough! You need Christ to justify you." But in 14 he tells them to turn from "worthless things"--idols--"to the living God" who he says is the real source of "joy"--he, not material things--is the real source. So he is saying, in effect: "you think you are free--but you are not! You are enslaved to dead idols." **d)** Despite all these very profound differences-- (1) Both audiences are told about a God who is both powerful yet good (13:16-22; 14:17), (2) in both he tells the hearers they are trying to save themselves in a wrong way (moral people by trying to obey the law 13:39 and pagans by giving themselves to idols and gods that cannot satisfy 14:15), and (3) both tell hearers not to turn to some scheme of performance, but that God has broken in to history now to accomplish our salvation. Even the speech of chapter 14, which was a spontaneous outburst, though it doesn't mention Christ directly, still points to the fact that salvation is something accomplished by God for us in history, not something we do.

Acts 16:1-5. Another fascinating example of contextualization is Paul's circumcision of Timothy so as not to offend those he was trying to reach. The juxtaposition can't be accidental. Though Paul has just fought vehemently against mandatory circumcision for believers, he circumcised Timothy out of sensitivity to the culture of the people he was trying to evangelize (v.3) It is a remarkable case of discerning between abiding principle and cultural practice. If anyone would have felt circumcising was intrinsically a wrong thing for a believer to do, it would have been Paul--who just fought a crucial battle for the gospel itself. Yet immediately he shows the difference between abiding principle and cultural practice. He knows that while the gospel of grace is an absolute--the practice of circumcision is culturally relative.

3. There is no 'non-contextualized' Christianity. Jesus didn't come to earth as a generalized being--by becoming human he had to become a particular human. He was male, Jewish, working-class. If he was to be human he had to become a socially and culturally-situated person. So the minute we begin to minister we must 'incarnate', even as Jesus did. Actual Christian practices must have both a Biblical form or shape as

well as a cultural form or shape. For example, the Bible clearly directs us to use music to praise God--but as soon as we choose a music to use, we enter a culture. As soon as we choose a language, as soon as we choose a vocabulary, as soon as we choose a particular level of emotional expressiveness and intensity, as soon as we choose even an illustration as an example for a sermon--we are moving toward the social context of some people and away from the social context of others. At Pentecost, everyone heard the sermon in his or her own language and dialect. But since Pentecost, we can never be 'all things to all people' at the very same time. So adaptation to culture is inevitable.

This is not relativism! "No truth which human beings may articulate can ever be articulated in a culture-transcending way--but that does not mean that the truth thus articulated does not transcend culture." (D.A.Carson) It is important to keep the balance of this statement! If you forget the first half you'll think there is only one true way to communicate the gospel. If you forget the second half you'll lose your grip on the fact that nonetheless there is only one true gospel. Either way you will be ineffective in ministry. Paul does not change the gospel--but he adapts it very heavily. Sure this opens the door to abuses, but to fear and refuse to adapt to culture opens to abuses of the gospel just as much! The balance is to not, on one hand succumb to relativism nor, on the other hand, think contextualization is really avoidable. Both are gospel-eroding errors.

Missionary strategy then consists of two parts: a) On the one hand, be sure not to remove any of the offensive essentials of the gospel message, such as the teaching on sin, the need for repentance, the lostness of those outside of Christ, and so on. b) On the other hand, be sure to remove any non-essential language or practice that will confuse or offend the sensibilities of the people you are trying to reach. The key to effective mission is to know the difference between essential and un-essential.

If we over-adapt to a culture we are trying to reach, it means we have bought in to that culture's idols. For example, we may take a good theme (e.g. "the freedom of the individual" in the West--which fits with the "priesthood of all believers") and allow it to be an idol (e.g. "individualism" so our church can't do pastoral accountability and discipline).

If, on the other hand we under-adapt to a culture, it means we have accepted our own culture's idols. To the degree a ministry is over or under adapted, it loses culture-transforming power.

The gospel is the key to contextualization. Remember that religion leads to either pride (if I am living up to standards) or inferiority (if I am failing to live up to standards) but the gospel makes us both humble and confident at once. This makes us contextualizers! If we need the approval of the receiving culture too much, it shows a lack of gospel confidence. If we need the trappings of our own culture too much, it shows a lack of gospel humility. Gospel humility directs us to neither hate tradition nor be bound to it. It is proud to imagine that other Christians did not find much grace in past 'contextualizations' and therefore we do not ignore tradition. But it is also proud to think that new cultural trends have no grace in them and that former cultures were all more spiritually pure. Thus we adapt.

[When] the church had lost track of an important element in the saving work of Christ and was teaching that believers are justified not by faith but by being sanctified...as a result it became very easy for the church to revert to an Old Covenant lifestyle....Uneasiness about justification [by grace alone] produced a flowering of asceticism reflecting an unconscious need for lists of clean and unclean activities and a rebirth of Pharisaism.Thus [those] who are not secure in Christ cast about for spiritual life preservers with which to support their confidence, and in their frantic search they not only cling to the shreds of ability and righteousness they find in themselves, but they fix upon their race, their membership in a party, their familiar social and ecclesiastical patterns, and their culture as means of self-recommendation. The culture is put on as if it were armor against self-doubt, but it becomes a mental straightjacket which cleaves to the flesh and

can never be removed except through comprehensive faith in the saving work of Christ. Once faith is exercised, a Christian is free to be enculturated, to wear his culture like a comfortable suit of clothes. He can shift to other cultural clothing temporarily if he wishes to do so, as Paul suggests in 1 Cor.9:19-23, and he is released to admire and appreciate the differing expressions of Christ shining out through other cultures. (Richard Lovelace, --The Dynamics of Spiritual Life, (IV, 1979) p. 190-1, 198)

4. Finding the balance. This raises a huge issue--sometimes called the 'homogeneous unit' principle. Are we going to 'target' some groups of people over others? How do we justify that? Paul's example again helps.

On one hand, Paul did focus on groups he thought strategic. Acts 16:13-"on the Sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there." Expected! How did Paul know a group of women would be down there? Lots of good studies on this. Paul had enormous success among 'God-fearers' (Gentile adherents to Biblical faith) in every town. They were 'key'. On one hand, they already had rudiments of Biblical world view--you could get right to Christ in a major way without (as Acts 14, 17 pagans) working on the most elementary and basic doctrines of God. On other hand, they were Gentiles, not Jews, with automatic, deep, personal relationships to the majority Gentile pagan population. In short, Jews were culturally distant from the community; the pagans were theologically distant from the Biblical world-view. The God-fearers were thus a great "stewardship" of ministry time. The key place to start, best stewardship, the best way to gather a core--was to find the God-fearers. Why did he go looking at the river. He would have immediately discovered that there was no synagogue in town, which meant that there were not 10 Jewish men in the city. So he looked for female-dominated prayer meeting. He got to town and made inquiries to discover it. He did not simply walk in and raise his voice in the streets. He was strategic.

Yet: Paul was trying to reach everyone. All through Acts 13-19 we see that Paul was clearly after everyone. He went to the synagogues to reach the religious. But he reasoned in the market place with the intellectual elites and he even hired out the Hall of Tyrannus to have open dialogues with pagans of all classes.

Summary: I think the answer is this. Yes, we can 'target'. 'Contextualization' is unavoidable. You yourself have 'incarnated' Christianity into a culture. As soon as you choose a language to preach in and illustrations and humor--you've contextualized. You are 'closer' to some people and 'farther' from others. And it is also right to have a heart for a certain people group and seek to serve and win them over others, in an effort to make sure that the new church's leaders come from this group. But, we must also seek to make our churches as mixed income and multi-cultural as possible. That is the Biblical mandate. At 'intake', as we initially seek to love and win people with the gospel, a certain amount of homogeneity is necessary. It would be nice if non-Christian people would not care about cultural differences, but people cannot be sanctified before they are justified!

To communicate the gospel one can't be too legalistically or too lawlessly--and to over or under adapt to the culture--is how a ministry becomes ineffective. If you could minister at the center of the two "axes"--or to the degree you do--there is power and effectiveness.

The Practice of Contextualization. The differences between three conversions of Acts 16 are amazing. Racially: Lydia Asian, Slave-girl probably native Greek, Jailer Roman. Economically: Lydia well off at least, business woman; Slave-girl poor, economically exploited and powerless; Roman jailer blue-collar, working class.

Spiritually: Lydia was a God-fearer, believed Bible and Biblical God. She was a moral, religious, good person who believed in the God of the Bible in a general way. She shows spiritual interest immediately. Slave-girl spiritually devastated, and literally runs after Paul, and in spiritual turmoil. She is the only one of

the three we could call in any sense a real 'seeker'! The Roman jailer neither spiritually interested and satisfied nor spiritually empty and tormented, but evidences no spiritual interest at all. Practically indifferent.

Ministry Approach:

Lydia largely through **words**. Though we are not told here, almost surely Paul would have approached God-fearers and Jews (not enough for a synagogue which required 10 men) through teaching and expounding the Bible in a new way for them--Christocentric exegesis. Showing--as Jesus did with his disciples in Luke 24--that the whole OT is really about him. This released Lydia from mere religion into gospel Christianity.

Slave-girl largely through **deeds**. It is interesting, that psychologically, she was oppressed by demonic false masters, but economically she was oppressed and exploited by human false masters. When Paul frees her from one, frees her from the other. What Paul does here, regardless of your views of miracles and exorcisms--is not just word but a deed. She is freed from demons, and freed from economic exploitation as well.

Jailer, largely through **embodied example**. Just as Lydia was probably an educated woman, needed an argument to be persuaded, and the troubled slave-girl needed deeds of service and liberation, so the jailer needed practical example of godly character. He was shocked by transformed lives. a) Heard them singing God's praise in face of suffering. Job 35:10--so men cry out under a load of oppression but no one says 'where is God my maker, who gives songs in the night?'" Struck by worship and songs in trouble. b) Saw, in response to his cruelty, kindness. When had a chance to escape, which would have ruined him, literally, they acted in integrity and stayed in the prison. Summary: Saw Christ-like character in community.

This is a church plant. What do we learn? That every church needs to engage its community in three basic strategies.

1. Acts 16:13-15 - WORD Ministry and The Gospel for the Religious

Paul finds a group of 'God-fearers', Gentiles who had embraced the Biblical faith (v.13) Lydia is an upstanding religious person who does not understand the gospel.

The Religious. Religion is 'outside in'--if I work hard according to Biblical principles, then God will accept/bless me. The gospel is 'inside out'--because God has accepted/blessed me, I work hard to live according to Biblical principles. Religion (explicitly in other faiths and implicitly in legalistic Christianity) makes moral/religious observance a means of salvation. Even people who believe in the Christian God can functionally 'base their sanctification on their justification' (Lovelace). Thus a prime need is to distinguish between general 'religion' and gospel Christianity as well as overt irreligion. Why? 1) Many professed Christians aren't believers--they are pure 'elder brothers' (Luke 15:11ff.) and only making this distinction can convert them. 2) Many, many real Christians are elder-brotherish--angry, mechanical, superior, insecure--and only making this distinction can renew them. 3) Modern and post-modern people have rejected religion for good reasons and will only listen to Christianity if they see it is different. The main way to reach religious people is through preaching. It must be 1) Christo-centric, 2) aimed at self-justifying roots of sinful behavior, 3) leading to worship rather than mere information transfer.

Word ministry issues.

Content-Linking the text into the 'Big Story'. What does it mean to 'proclaim the gospel'? How can you do so in a way that both wakes up/converts the religious and yet also engages more secular people? Answer: Christ-centered interpretation and preaching. You must always preach every text in such a way that it reveals Jesus and his saving work. Ed Clowney points out that if we ever tell a *particular* Bible story

without putting it into the overall main Bible story (about Christ), we actually change the meaning of the particular event for us. It becomes a moralistic exhortation to 'try harder' rather than a call to live by faith in the work of Christ. There is, in the end, only two ways to read the Bible: *is it basically about me or basically about Jesus?* In other words, is it basically about what I must do, or basically about what he has done? Example: If I read David and Goliath as basically giving me an example, then the story is really about me. I must summons up the faith and courage to fight the giants in my life. But if I read David and Goliath as basically showing me salvation through Jesus, then the story is really about him. Until I see that Jesus fought the real giants (sin, law, death) for me, I will never have the courage to be able to fight ordinary giants in life (suffering, disappointment, failure, criticism, hardship). The Bible is not a collection of "Aesop's Fables", it is not a book of virtues. It is a story about how God saves us. Any exposition of a text that does not 'get to Christ' but just 'explains Biblical principles' will be a 'synagogue sermon' that merely exhorts people to exert their wills to live according to a particular pattern. Instead of the life-giving gospel, the sermon offers just one more ethical paradigm to crush the listeners.

Method--Linking the text to the people's story: How will you verbally proclaim the gospel to people? We said above you must incorporate every text into Christ's story or else you are just being moralistic and you won't reach the religious and the secular. But secondly, you must connect your preaching of the gospel with the stories of the people of your place. How do gospel themes address your culture's hopes, fears, tensions? (1) Begin with familiar and show how the gospel confirms what is strong and good in the culture. Know the people's story extremely well. Show your sympathy with it. (2) But use the gospel to challenge and de-stabilize common cultural assumptions at points that they are weak or inadequate. (3) Finally, comfort and galvanize with the promises of the gospel. *Show them that they can't finish their own story without God in Christ.*

Example: Traditional ways to 'argue' for the infallibility of the Bible are 1) evidentialist way of fulfilled prophecies, archaeological findings, historicity arguments of eyewitness accounts, etc. 2) pre-suppositional way of Van Till--assuming it as the only way to explain life 3) moderate method of historicity-then faith in Christ-then belief in Christ's testimony to the Bible. But each of these methods tends to assume the listener is a modern, Enlightenment person whose 'story' is to live a life based on reason and science. Alternative approach: Most contemporary people are allergic to the idea of absolute truth or an infallible Bible. Enter the Story: *Desire for a personal relationship with God.* Wouldn't you want to have a God with whom you can have an intimate, living, personal relationship? Challenge: But if you want a personal relationship, the other person will have to be able to contradict you. If a wife can never contradict her husband, you don't have a real personal relationship (e.g. "The Stepford Wives") Now, if you pick and choose what you can believe in the Bible and what you can't believe (on the basis of modern thinking or personal feelings), then how will you ever have a God who can contradict you? Only if God can be or say things that outrage you will you know you have a real God and not a figment of your imagination. So an authoritative Bible is not the enemy of a personal, mystical relationship with God. It is the pre-condition. Jesus related to God on the basis of the Bible. *You won't be able to finish your own story without the Bible Jesus believed in.*

Speak to your whole community, not just the ones in the seats. If your church is to be a church for the whole neighborhood, you must preach and minister as if the people nearby who don't believe are there. You must conduct church as if the whole community was listening in. If you preach as if non-Christians from the community were there (even if they weren't!), it was not long before they were there. Why? Even in thriving churches, the whole service usually assumes: 1) a lot of Biblical knowledge, 2) a 'we-them' mentality (we Christians vs. the big, bad world), 3) much evangelical terminology. Thus most Christians, even when they are very edified in church, know intuitively that their non-Christian friends would not appreciate the service. What you want is for a Christian to come to your church and say, "oh! I wish my non-Christian friend could see (or hear) this!" If this is forgotten, soon even a growing church will be filled with Christians who commute

in from various towns and communities far and wide rather than filling up with Christians and seekers from your church's immediate neighborhoods.

2. Acts 16:16-19 - HOLISTIC Ministry and The Gospel for the Post-modern

The slave-girl (v.16) (lit. "the Pythoness") was poor, and she cannot be liberated simply through preaching, but by a direct encounter with the powers that bind her, spiritually, socially, and economically. There is deed ministry here, as well as a word.

Deed Ministry issues: Jesus considered a concern for the poor to be a mark of his presence (Matt 11:5). Increasingly, in a globalized world, we will win neither the elites nor the masses unless we embody the gospel in strong ministry to people with economic and material needs as well as spiritual.

The renewal of Christ's salvation ultimately includes a renewed universe...there is no part of our existence that is untouched by His blessing. Christ's miracles were miracles of the kingdom, performed as signs of what the kingdom means....His blessing was pronounced upon the poor, the afflicted, the burdened and heavy-laden who came to Him and believed in Him....The miraculous signs that attested Jesus' deity and authenticated the witness of those who transmitted the gospel to the church is not continued, for their purpose was fulfilled. But the pattern of the kingdom that was revealed through those signs must continue in the church....Kingdom evangelism is therefore holistic as it transmits by word and deed the promise of Christ for body and soul as well as the demand of Christ for body and soul.

Edmund P. Clowney, in *The Pastor Evangelist*)

Evaluation questions:

How will you serve the people around you? How will you show that Christ is come to bring peace/shalom to the world?

Think of community service *content* that fits the culture. How will you show the community you love them even if they don't believe? (1) What are the 'felt needs' of the individuals in your community that are largely shared alike by Christians and non-Christians. This varies greatly depending on your neighborhood. What are the emotional needs of the elderly, families, teens, singles, men, women, children? What are the social or economic or educational needs of the same? (2) What are the flaws and difficulties with the systems of the community. Again, this varies greatly depending on your neighborhood. In prosperous communities, the educational and economic systems 'work' better. In other communities, even the streets are not safe to walk in. The key is to find ways to stand with the broader community to face effects of our fallen condition and be, as a church, a 'sign of the kingdom' of God. Find ways to bring emotional, social, spiritual healing in a way that the world can see.

Think of community service *connection* modes that fit the culture. How will you link your church to the needs of the community culture in such a way that is 'holistic', weaving verbal witness and Christian community together with service to the world? In other words, do not simply create 'social programs' but link outreach service ministry with small group fellowship and with worship and verbal expressions of the gospel.

Counter-intuitive holistic ministry. Most people have a very powerful desire (need?) to place a church somewhere on a ideological spectrum from "Liberal/Left" wing to "Conservative/Right" wing. There is nothing more crucial than to use the gospel in the life of our church to defy such stereotypes and to (thus) become impossible to categorize. On the one hand the gospel of Christ and justification-by-faith brings deep, powerful psychological changes. Though I am sinful, I am accepted through Christ. This discovery "converts" people, so they sing, "My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed Thee". On the other hand, the gospel of the cross and the kingdom brings deep powerful social changes. It defies

the values of the world--power, status, recognition, wealth. The gospel is triumph through weakness, wealth through poverty, power through service. This changes our attitude toward the poor, toward our own status and wealth and careers.

Together, these two "sides" of the gospel's influence creates a unique kind of church. So many fundamentalist churches tend to be legalistic in their approach (even if they technically believe in justification by faith!). Therefore, though they stress evangelism, they are not all that attractive or effective. Legalism does not produce 'reciprocal' love for those without faith. On the other hand, so many liberal churches, though they stress social justice, are not all that effective at it. Their people's lives are not electrified by conversion. They do not have deep experiences that humble them and change the way they look at the poor. Therefore, a gospel-centered church should have a social justice emphasis and effectiveness that greatly exceeds the liberal church's. Meanwhile, it should have an evangelistic fervor that greatly exceeds the ordinary fundamentalist church's. This gospel-driven, counter-intuitive combination of 'zeals' can only come through teaching, prayer, and repentance.

'Post-modern' ministry issues: The slave-girl also represents the haunted insight of the coming 'post-modern' culture. Lydia lives on the Upper East Side in Manhattan, and the Jailer lives in Queens, New York, but the slave-girl is an artist with a drug habit living in the East Village of Manhattan. (1) Apologetics is constantly necessary, but it should be mainly presuppositional. Show that relativism is intolerant. (2) Stress small groups over all other programs. (3) In preaching, Jesus is not teacher of principles (for traditionalists) or healer of hurts (for moderns) but the savior in history. Religion is self-salvation through principles (modern or traditional) while the gospel is salvation through entering a story--the myth that became fact--Jesus' redemptive life. The result of religion is moralism and oppression; the result of relativism is selfish individualism--both are unacceptable. (4) Evangelism: (a) 'more evangelized' searchers will come right in to all services, groups and ministries. There must be participation before transformation. (b) 'less' evangelized people are now reached through non-condescending cultural and social involvement. Do friendship (not even friendship evangelism--gospel character produces friendship about them). Evangelism is more about how we live with a new quality of life: we show how the gospel helps us embrace the excluded, be a servant of common good, live with integrity regarding sex, money and power. (c) evangelism has more to do with excellence and thoughtfulness in the way we do our work. (5) Music/worship cannot be confined to the classical or the contemporary. High quality aesthetics are critical in our technological yet anti-rational age. (6) The preferable *ministry area* is again the parish--the neighborhood. (7) Stress racial reconciliation and multi-cultural community. This has always been Biblical, but now it's practical. Society is becoming more multi-ethnic and concerned with building bridges. (8) Stress lay leadership--all deeply based on friendship (very organic) rather than program (inorganic). Skepticism about expertise will encourage lay leadership. (9) Communication style must have the 'irony' of gospel-humility rather than the typical pomposity of traditional Christianity or slick-cool-controlled nature of modern Christianity. But the challenge is to avoid the 'irony' of cynicism. Cynical-irony is seeing other's sin as worse than yours (a plank vs. your splinter) while humble-irony is seeing your sin as worse than others' (a splinter vs. your plank).

'Freedom' vs 'Forgiveness' Gospel. The basic difference between people I meet today has to do with how and why they will see they need the gospel. People from traditional cultures and mindsets tend to a) have a belief in God, and b) have a strong sense of moral absolutes and the obligation to be "good". This may be a sense of obligation to their family, their people, a general moral ethic, a tradition, a religion (including Christianity), and so on. These folk respond well to a presentation that says, "*Sin keeps you from ever being as good as you need to be*, and it therefore separates you from God." People with more secular and "post-modern" mindsets tend to a) have only a vague belief in the divine if at all and, b) have little sense of moral absolutes. Therefore, they feel the obligation to be free and true to their own selves and dreams. These folk respond well to a presentation that says, "*Sin keeps you from being free as you need to be*, and therefore it enslaves and de-humanizes you."

"The Gospel as Forgiveness". The way to show the traditional persons their need for the gospel is by saying, "your sin makes you imperfect! You can't be righteous enough. You may think you are looking to God for salvation, but you are really trying to save yourself." (Imperfection is the biggest nightmare of the "duty-worshipper". We say "you are not living up!" so they are threatened.) This approach creates anxiety and relieves it by showing how Christ forgives us, covers our sins and gives us a righteous record. "The Gospel as Freedom". But the way to show more deeply secularized persons their need for the gospel is by saying, "your sin makes you a slave! You are actually being religious, though you don't know it--trying to be righteous in a destructive way". (Slavery is the biggest nightmare of the "choice--worshipper". We say, "you are not really in control" so they are threatened.) This approach creates anxiety and relieves it by showing how Christ redeems us (lit. "ransoms us from slavery"), liberates us.

Each approach is Biblical, of course. Romans tends to give the first approach (though see Romans 6-8). Galatians tends to give the second approach. Paul insists that his pagan converts, if they go with the "Judaizers", will only be going back into bondage. Paul equates religious moralism and pagan hedonism as being essentially the same thing. Each of the two approaches assumes a piece of common grace, a certain insight about truth. The older cultures saw *duty* as the key of salvation. The gospel says: "but you AREN'T living up to your duty unless you come to God through the finished work of Christ." The newer culture sees *freedom* as the key of salvation. The gospel says: "but your AREN'T free unless you come to God through the finished work of Christ." Now in both situations, we must be careful. The first approach to the gospel must be careful not to let the hearers think that the gospel is just a way to get a free pardon. The second approach to the gospel must be careful not to let the hearers think that the gospel is just a way to get personal fulfillment. In former times, when churches were so filled with people who were traditional, we had to avoid preaching any "salvation through duty". (We failed to avoid it, in fact.) Now churches are so filled with people who are therapized to seek fulfillment, we must avoid preaching any "salvation through discovery". (We are failing to avoid it, in fact.)

Who are the two kinds of people? Every person must be considered on a case by case basis. But here are some ideas for who these two kinds of people tend to be, at least in the U.S. The first set of people (more traditional worlds-view) tend to include: people who are older, who are from strong Catholic or religious Jewish backgrounds, who are from conservative evangelical/Pentecostal Protestant backgrounds, people from the southern U.S., and first generation immigrants from non-European countries. The second set of people tend to include: people who are younger, who are from nominal/weak Catholic or non-religious Jewish backgrounds, who are from liberal mainline Protestant backgrounds, people from the western and northeastern U.S., Europeans (here in the states), and the children of families from non-Western countries.

In most non-Western (non U.S-European), the traditional world-view is more prevalent in less urban areas and less educated classes, while the secular world-view is more prevalent in more urban areas and more educated classes. We must also notice that this division also runs along a divide between older secularists and newer secularists in the West. The older secularism has been called "modern" and the newer "post-modern". In the earlier part of the century, modern secular people still had a high belief in reason and were very moral. But as the century has waned, "post-modern" secularists are far more relativistic and are skeptical of objective reality of any kind, whether empirical or moral. Therefore, very moral yet secular parents have produced very a-moral, secular children.

Summary. In general, I want to show that it is best to communicate in the second mode, "The Gospel as Freedom" because the second mode ...critiques (as we see in Galatians) both ways of rejecting the gospel--both moralism/traditionalism and relativism/hedonism, while the first approach only critiques moralism.

3. Acts 16:20-40- CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY and The Gospel for the Secular World

Acts 16:25 - Worshipping Community

Paul and Silas worship God before the unbelievers (v.25). Maybe Paul had this in mind when he spoke of the power of worship for the non-believer (1 Cor.14:24-25).

God commanded Israel to invite the nations to join in declaring his glory. Zion is to be the center of world-winning worship (Isaiah 2:2-4; 56:6-8). In Acts 2 and I Cor. 14:23ff we see non-believers attracted and disturbed by worship. We learn 1) nonbelievers are expected in worship, 2) non-believers must find worship challenging and comprehensible, not comfortable. If the Sunday service and sermon aim primarily at evangelism, it will bore the saints. If they aim primarily at education, they will bore and confuse unbelievers. If they aim at praising the God who saves by sheer grace they will both instruct the saints and challenge the sinners. Evangelistic worship is especially important for post-modern people for whom context is everything and who need to see how the gospel 'works' in people's lives. What does it take? 1) General principle-- worship as if non-Christians are present before they really are, and they will be brought. 2) Specifics: a) inclusive quality of speaking and music, b) noble simplicity of language (not sentimental, austere, archaic, or colloquial), c) solve people's problems with the gospel.

Acts 16:20-34 - Practicing Community

We verbal, rational Reformed types won't be excited to see that only one of the three representative conversions is done through preaching. The other two happen through a power encounter and through the quality of true virtue--gospel character. The Jailer is shocked by joy apart from circumstances (v.25), attractive character and integrity (v.28)

Jonathan Edwards: For Edwards there is "common virtue" and "true virtue". Virtuous behavior can be inspired by **fear** ("if you are not honest, God will punish you!") or by **pride** ("I am not like the kind of people who lie"). But almost always we lie out of fear or pride. So in common virtue, you have restrained the heart, but not changed the heart. The virtuous behavior is very fragile, and it feeds insecurity, self-righteousness, and oppression toward others. You are nurturing the roots of sin within your moral life. Luther says that we only break commandments #2-10 because we first break #1--making some other 'god' our justification and righteousness besides Christ. Therefore, we can not create true virtue unless we use the gospel on the root self-justification underneath the sinful behavior. "True" honesty only grows by a rejoicing sight of the glory of Christ and his salvation. It grows when I see him dying for me, keeping a promise he made despite the infinite suffering it brought him. Now that a) destroys pride on the one hand, because he had to do this for me--I am so lost! But that also b) destroys fear on the other hand, because if he'd do this for me while I'm an enemy, then he values me infinitely, and nothing I can do will wear out his love for me. Then my heart is not just restrained by changed. It's fundamental orientation is transformed. "Common virtue" brings the self-righteousness and exclusionary attitudes that post-modern people hate. "True virtue" is the only kind of new character and it creates the new community that will be the ultimate post-modern apologetic. Also, the way true virtue is produced is an application of the gospel of grace in worship and small groups. This means that both Christians and non-Christians can be included and hear with profit the same basic message. This kind of 'virtue production' is the only way to produce "spiritually inclusive' community.

Acts 16:35-39 - Socially Engaged Community

Paul and Silas are not hesitant to point out a miscarriage of justice. John Stott thinks that this was necessary to 'create space' for the new young church. Christians are to judiciously bring their faith to bear on their lives in the 'public' sector.

We must not form 1) a sub-culture in which we externally dress and talk (dialect) differently avoid certain gross behaviors, but internally we have the same values as the surrounding culture. (E.g. believers may not

smoke or drink too much or have sex outside of marriage, yet in their core beings they may be as materialistic and individualistic, and status- or image-conscious as the society around.) We must also not form 2) an anti-culture in which Christians feel highly polluted by the very presence of the unbelieving schools, entertainment, arts, and culture. In this model they feel they cannot really function in the society without getting the cultural power back through legislation and storming institutions directly. We must also not form 3) a para-culture expecting a miraculous, sweeping intervention by God which will convert many or most individuals and explosively transform the culture. Instead of becoming deeply engaged with the society and people around them, working with others as co-citizens to deal with the troubles and problems, believers concentrate completely on evangelism and discipleship building up the church and their own numbers. Rather we should form 4) a counter-culture. This is the reverse of a 'sub-culture'--we are to be externally quite like the surrounding culture (positive toward and conversant with it), without 'jargon' and other Christians trappings--yet in worldview, values, and lifestyle, they demonstrate chastity, simplicity, humility and self-sacrifice. They are quite different in the way they understand money, relationships, human life, sex, and so on. Hananiah is an example of the 'para-culture' in Jer.28; Jeremiah is a proponent of the 'counter-culture' in Jer.29.

Acts 16:40 - The Unifying Power of the Gospel

Think now of the membership in Lydia's house-church. The three converts show that it embraces different races (Lydia was Asian, the slave-girl was likely Greek, the Jailer was Roman), different economic classes (Lydia was white-collar, the slave-girl was poor, the Jailer was working-class), different cognitive styles (Lydia was rational, the slave-girl was intuitive, the Jailer was concrete-relational). The gospel leads them to embrace one another--they are 'brethren' (v.40). The ancient prayer was: "God, I thank you that I am not a woman, a slave, or a Gentile"--but that is the three groups that God shows his grace to!

One of the main problems that post-modern people have with both modern and traditional world-views (and Christianity is seen as falling within one or the other) is the way in which they exclude. If you have 'the truth' or 'the universals', that excludes and divides. But as Newbiggin shows, 'relativism' is as exclusive in its claims, and in the end can be a warrant for worse oppression than the modern and traditional. Christians must communicate and demonstrate that the gospel is different. Jesus says that is a sign of gospel-faith: Matthew 5:47. If you only greet your brothers, what do ye more than others? Since the Jewish greeting was Shalom! and an embrace, Jesus is saying much. We must show our uniqueness by following our Lord who always embraced the moral and spiritual outsider. Matt.21:31-"The prostitutes and the tax collectors are entering the kingdom of God before you." If you understand the gospel of grace you treat the 'other': a) With respect. Grace means the non-believer may be a better person. b) With courage. Grace means the non-believer's possible rejection of us is not so fearsome. c) With hope. Grace means you are a miracle and no one is beyond hope. No other world-view can produce this combination of humility and confidence.

Community Ministry Issues: How will you form a community that is rich and deep in love for one another and exhibits to the world the distinct life, individually and corporately, that we have in Christ?

Think of community *content* that fits the culture. What will a gospel-renewed human society in your culture look like? Be sure to both honor the culture yet renew it with the gospel. Consider how your community will be shaped with regard to: (1) Leadership structure/decision-making. (How will it be led? How much authority will the leaders have vs. the entire membership? How will decisions be made?) (2) Infra-community structure. (How will your people love and know one another intimately? How will they hold each other accountable? How will they grow spiritually through mutual ministry to one another?) (3) Music/worship. (What will the worshipping community look like? What Biblical/worship tradition will connect you to the historic church? How will your culture shape the way music and the arts are used? What will the worship demeanor and voice of your congregation be?) (4) Being a 'community of character'. What key ethical

themes and personal changes will be encouraged? What picture of Christian family life will you hold up? What picture of mature Christian individual will you hold up?

Think of community *connections* that fit the culture. How will you literally connect and welcome and draw people from the broader community into your Christian community? How will you meet and get to know the people of your neighborhood/region? (1) Remember that where the pastor and the core leaders live is all important. The only organic, natural way to connect to the broader community is to live right in the area of ministry/worship and be co-citizens and face the life-issues of the community with everyone else. (2) Consider 'front-door' events: (a) historical church re-plant (using the building to reach out), (b) 'open forums', concerts, (c) evangelistically attuned Sunday worship 'side-door' events: counseling, house groups etc. Innumerable ideas are possible here. Spend a lot of time in brainstorming and reflecting. (3) Small groups that are well equipped to reach out to their own block, housing division, apartments buildings. Other off-site, weekday meetings that enfold new people well.

End Note: "If you're not in a small group, you're not in the church." How mobile our society has become! Fewer and fewer people live in a region in which they have been born and raised and that is filled with networks of their family, relatives, and long-time friends. But both church leaders and church members often expect that care and nurture will happen through informal, word-of-mouth communication and unplanned relationships between (usually) pastors and parishioners. It took us nearly two years to realize that the traditional approach can't work in a city. It is through a network of 'cells'--small group fellowships--that we can nurture and care for one another. Soon I began to warn people: "If you are a member or regular attender at Redeemer, and you have a spiritual problem, or you get sick, or you have some kind of acute need in your life--we certainly will try to help. But if you are not in a group and we are slow to respond, you don't really have a warrant to complain. It is through small groups that we can provide care and opportunities through learning, and it is through the groups that we know quickly if you have a need the Body can meet. So--practically speaking--if you aren't in a small group, you aren't fully in the church."