

March 7, 2010

Faith and Culture –Change for good

(Is 45:1-5, Acts 13;44-52,Mat 15:21-28)

The word culture is far too simple to explain the multitude of complex components and relationships that exist in every culture. However many who are involved in cross cultural missions have tried their best to give us simple models to understand the culture of people to whom we want to give the Gospel. One such model is to view culture as having several outer layers before one really understands the heart of the culture. In one such model given, the outermost layer is the peoples' behavior i.e. What the people do? The next layer is the values of those people i.e. What is it that people think good or best? The next inner layer is their beliefs i.e. what is truth according to them? The innermost layer is their world view i.e what is it that they think is real?

Has not God pronounced everything good when He created man and his environment? But the fall left its mark on creation, creature and culture. The simple but sublime story in the first chapters of Genesis forms the basis of a theology of culture that is amplified through out sacred scripture. Man's relationship to God precedes and prescribes all other relationships. In this sense true religion is prior to culture, not simply a part of it. In listening to Satan and choosing to disobey God, man invited the impress of sin upon all that he was and all he touched. The fall did not result in the eradication of the image of God in the creature nor in the countermanding of all cultural prerogatives. But it did interpose another and false authority over man and it did mar man's person and productions. Only under Christ can man be redeemed and culture renewed.

It is God who has ordained culture but now we are not allowing Him to order culture. Satan is indeed the "god of this world (2 Cor 4:4). We know that from the beginning it is Satan who is the Father of all lies spoiling God's good creation. But the Bible tells us that God's good plan for mankind is making everything including culture new through Christ Jesus (Rev 21:5). In today's Old Testament lesson God is once again reminding us that He is the sovereign God and may use any one in fulfilling His plan. In today's epistle lesson God is showing us how we can work together to make culture Christian

like Paul and Barnabas. In today's gospel lesson God is showing us how as parents we have to pray for the salvation of our children who have come under the bad influence of modern culture and have fallen into the hands of Satan.

The guiding principle we have as transforming agents of culture is not to conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind and approving God's good, pleasing and perfect will in everything(Rom 12:2). Let us look this verse in message Bible

" . Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you".

**The Old Testament lesson: Isaiah 45:1-5
God has a plan to make everything new including our culture.**

The people of God had been to Babylonian exile because of their sin of rebellion against God by worshipping idols like the people around them. Out of His mercy towards his people He alone took initiative to bring them back to Jerusalem. For that purpose He chose the pagan king Cyrus. Even though Cyrus did not know the Lord the Lord called him to fulfill a special task. Nobody and nothing can stop God from doing what ever He wills, for He alone is the sovereign Lord and there is no God besides Him. Realizing this truth we should be very careful not to compromise our faith by trying to imitate the people around us doing what they do in the name of culture. When we make our calling and election sure God will use any body in any culture like Paul and Barnabas. This is to day's epistle lesson.

**The Epistle lesson: Acts 13:44-52
We are the transforming agents**

The gospel mandate requires that we teach others to observe all that Christ has commanded. In doing we touch culture and this brings opposition .In India are we not accused of destroying the culture? However we can not attempt to stay away the culture line and deal

only with matters of the soul because communication is inextricable from culture. We are sure to have persecution like Paul and Barnabas but we have to press on like them to go from one place to another place. Persecution comes not only from out side but also from within. To day are not those men of God who preach on salvation criticized by all the denominational Christians, like Paul and Barnabas were persecuted by the religious Jews. But God knows those who are His (2 Tim 2:19). There fore all those who are appointed to eternal life will be saved in our ministry. True men of God will always go boldly from one place to another like Paul and Barnabas. Our God always honor the faith of every one who comes to Him irrespective of race, caste and religious cultures like the Canaanite woman in today's gospel lesson.

The Gospel lesson: Mathew 15:21-28
We have to guard our children from falling into cultural trap.

Even though Mathew wrote the Gospel primarily to the Jews he made it very clear that salvation is for all. Take for example both the persons who were commended by Jesus of having great faith were gentiles. (The Canaanite woman and the Roman centurion in Mat 8:5-13). In both the cases Jesus healed the one in need from a distance. Spiritually speaking the gentiles were "afar of" until Calvary. When Jesus died for both Jews and gentiles and made reconciliation possible (Ep2:11ff).

Here is a lesson for all of us .Just as Jesus was drawing out of the woman a growing response of faith we too have to help the people who come to us with some faith in Jesus. Jesus never called the gentiles dogs like the Jews of His day. He only used the word the pet dog as an illustration to tell her that His mission was first to the people of Israel whom He called Children. But the woman immediately seized on the illustration about the children, bread which was exactly what Jesus wanted to do .Jesus commended her faith and healed her daughter.

Here are some more lessons for us. If we don't correct our children who in the name of modern culture do all sorts of things in the way they sport their hair or the way they dress, they fall into the trap of Satan. Before the matter slips out of our control we have to pray for their salvation and lead them to Christ. Let me remind you Jeremiah's warning about how death may enter into our homes and cities through our windows XP i.e. through our TV and internet culture

to swallow our young(Jer 9:20,21).Not only we have to pray for our children like the Canaanite woman but we are also instructed to teach our children to pray. May God help us to be agents of transformation in our homes and our Churches!

Life Application:

1. Anything that takes the first place instead of God will become idol. Let us be careful that money and fashion may not become our Gods.
2. Let us preach the word by the power of the Holy Spirit and transform our culture.
3. Let us be careful that our children may not do things that are unscriptural in the name of culture.