



# *gospel & culture*

GOSPEL & CULTURE FRAMEWORK  
WEEK 1 | PASTOR STEVEN LEE

# Gospel & Culture: A Working Framework for Engaging the Culture as Jesus' Followers

As we began our 10-week Summer Forum on how Christians can engage culture with the transforming work of the gospel, we sought to establish a broad working framework before addressing more specific topics and issues. I shared eight principles for Christians to consider when we engage culture with the gospel of Christ. These principles emerge from our understanding of Scripture and God's call on believers. Here are the eight principles for engaging culture with the gospel:

**1) ARTICULATE THE GOSPEL: As Christians engage culture, we must continually articulate the truth of the gospel and the biblical worldview that the gospel assumes.**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the sole sufficient change-agent for the world. We can never neglect the verbal articulation of the gospel (Rom. 10:14-16) because it is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16) for everyone who believes in Jesus (Rom. 10:13). We need to be bold in declaring God's truth like the apostles, regardless of the consequences (Acts 4:19-20). We will be emboldened when we remember that sin and death have been defeated, Satan is destined for destruction and no power or kingdom can withstand the advance of the kingdom of God.

**2) BE GENTLE & SHREWD: Christians must embody the tenderness, compassion and confidence of Christ while speaking the hard truths of Scripture with boldness and clarity.**

Jesus calls his disciples to be gentle as doves and shrewd as serpents (Matt. 10:16). Christians ought to be compassionate and tender toward all people, especially unbelievers, because all

people are made in God's image (Gen. 1:27) and, without Christ, are sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36). Yet, Christians must also be bold and clear regarding biblical truth. Every conversation is an opportunity to plant seeds of the gospel—with clarity, compassion, confidence and gentleness—in the lives of those around us, trusting in the work of the Holy Spirit.

**3) REMEMBER THE REAL ENEMY: The real battle is not against a particular group, agenda, political party, cult or radical religious system, but it is against Satan and the spiritual forces of darkness.**

Ephesians 6 states that Christians “do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:10-12). We were all once enemies of Christ. What would it look like if we engaged the lost as we would have liked to be engaged if we were still living in the dark? We cannot forget that the horrible plight of the lost is that they are under the wrath of God, and they cannot escape it apart from Christ. We must pray as we read the headlines and as we engage our coworkers and neighbors. A battle rages for the lives of those still under the blinding influence of sin and Satan.

**4) RIGHTLY APPLY THE SCRIPTURES: Christians must be able to understand how the Bible speaks about the various cultural issues and how faithful Christians are called to emulate God in all our relationships and activities.**

Christians need to be well versed in the Scriptures so that we can see not just how particular verses speak about an issue but how the broad sweep of Scripture and the nuances of the Bible inform how we engage culture. As followers of Christ, we must know our Bibles more, not less, as we face challenges to our faith. Even in the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4, Satan quotes Psalm 91 to try to get Jesus to test God the Father. Yet Jesus rebuts Satan by quoting

Deuteronomy 6:16. We must continually apply, explain and teach the simple and complex truths of Scripture and give a coherent articulation of the gospel to those who disbelieve.

**5) KNOW YOUR MISSION: Followers of Christ are called to be salt and light for the good of the world around us, even if at great personal cost**

Pastor Josh Moody taught Matthew 5:13-16 a few years ago and explained how Christians are called to be global moral preservatives and global moral illuminators (e.g. salt and light). Being light will instinctively make some people recoil in anger because they love the darkness and hate the light (John 3:20). Nonetheless, remember your calling and mission if you are a disciple of Christ: To go and make disciples by the power of the Spirit and through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is our mission whether in the home or the workplace, on the golf course or in the boardroom, in the classroom or at the pool. Christians go in the power of God as salt and light into everyplace.

**6) RECALL GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY: God is sovereignly over all creation such that no aspect of our world today is outside of God's influence through the labors and engagement of his people.**

Abraham Kuyper famously wrote "Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" God is sovereign over all things, so we need to engage and labor in all areas of our world. Galatians 6:10 reminds believers to do good to everyone, and especially fellow believers. In light of God's sovereignty, Christians ought to condemn wickedness (e.g. racism, human trafficking, oppression of the poor, senseless violence and the abuse of power) and labor for good in various areas (education, Wall Street, public office, orphan care, sanctity of life causes, poverty, publishing and technology). No aspect of this world is

outside of God's oversight and none of it should be outside of the influence of Christians working for the common good.

**7) RECOGNIZE DEPRAVITY & GRACE: Continually be cognizant of the total depravity of mankind and God's lavish common grace that has been poured out for the benefit and good of society.**

The doctrine of total depravity—that from birth all mankind is incapable of pleasing God or acting in accord with God (as defined by theologian Wayne Grudem)—tempers our expectations of redeeming or copying or consuming culture. It is impossible for unregenerate people to please God (Heb. 11:6). Yet God's common grace is lavishly poured out on mankind (Matt. 5:43-48) so that our society benefits from much good—done by both Christians and non-Christians—that betters our society. This truth helps us to not be surprised when unregenerate people behave sinfully and do not honor God. But Christians can also be incredibly thankful that there are many people who do not know Christ who serve our society in a multitude of good ways. This should drive us towards greater gospel faithfulness—as thankful and unsurprised—because Christ is the only eternal hope for all people.

**8) OUR METHODS OUGHT TO MATCH OUR MESSAGE: Our means of cultural engagement must match the type of message and communication we want to get across to those we engage.**

Russell Moore in his book *Onward* writes, "The church does not bear the sword that's been given to the state; the church advances by spiritual, not carnal, means." As an institution founded by Jesus Christ, our weapons for warfare are not of the flesh (2 Cor. 10:3-4). We are called to love our neighbors and even our enemies (Matt. 5:44), to boldly proclaim the gospel (Eph. 6:19-20), and to display the loving sacrifice of our Savior to communicate the gospel, even in sufferings (Col. 1:24).

As followers of Christ, we must continue to remember that our allegiance is to Christ alone, and we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom, even as we labor and live as citizens of an earthly one. We are to love Christ and our neighbors, using our influence to advance the gospel, serve the common good and live out our various callings through biblically shaped worldviews and lives.

We need to continue to lean into uncomfortable situations and relationships in order to live out the gospel of Christ. And we must not be silent. Buying a bunker in the Montana mountains or becoming a recluse is not an option. We must continue to proclaim the truth of the gospel for those without Christ and continue to advocate for a just and peaceful society that would be conducive for the spread of the gospel.

Christians swear allegiance to Christ, live according to his Word, and go to great lengths to make disciples of all nations. As we do so in our various spheres of influence, we go as the light of Christ in the power of Christ to carry out Christ's work. We do not shrink back but lead with love and declare the truth with boldness and conviction.

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection:**

1. Which of these principles for engaging culture with the gospel was surprising? Helpful? Why?
2. How can these principles help you think about what is taking place in our culture?
3. How can some of these principles guide you as you pray for our community and engage unbelievers in your life on a regular basis?
4. What might you add to these principles? What passages of Scripture inform and guide your thinking?

### **Additional Resources for Further Reading:**

*Every Square Inch: An Introduction to Cultural Engagement for Christians* by Bruce Ashford

*The City of God* by Saint Augustine of Hippo

*Christ & Culture Revisited* by D.A. Carson

*Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* by Andy Crouch

*What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* by Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert

*Common Grace: God's Gifts for a Fallen World, Volume 1* by Abraham Kuyper

*Word Versus Deed: Resetting the Scales to a Biblical Balance* by Duane Litfin

*Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* by Russell Moore

*Christ and Culture* by Richard Niebuhr

*Counter Culture* by David Platt



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