

Theme: We are called to engage our current culture, contextualizing the Gospel so that it will be intelligible to our friends, but we must be aware of the unique but ever present dangers that come with each culture, age and technology, understanding the world will always try to seduce our hearts away from Christ and the Gospel.

## I. Intro – The Amish, the Borg and Technology

- A. Amish approach to technology - frozen in 1750
- B. Amish - avoid modern technology as much as possible
- C. The Borg from Star Trek - assimilate everything
- D. The Borg - adopt every new technology to evolve
- E. How are Christians called to handle culture & technology?
- F. What is a biblical approach to living in culture & technology?

## II. Christians - Called To Contextualize

- A. Understanding contextualization
  - 1. Contextualization - adapting to our cultural context to help make the Gospel intelligible and attractive to our audience.
  - 2. We must recognize our cultural context is important
  - 3. Culture includes language, dress, practices - and technology
  - 4. Technology always affects culture - it is never inert, having no effect on culture
  - 5. In our culture technology is particularly front and center, having a visible, pronounced effect on culture and our daily lives

## B. Paul adapted himself to his audience/culture

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone... <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law... <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law... <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 1 Corinthians 9:19–22

- 1. Notice that Paul is adapting to his audience
- 2. These are major cultural adaptations - food, drink, food sacrificed to idols, holidays, rituals, etc.
- 3. Paul states this point 5 times for emphasis!
- 4. Paul is setting an example of contextualizing the Gospel for our audience
- 5. To see examples, compare Paul's sermons in Acts 13 and Acts 17 - two different audiences, two very different messages

- C. Paul's reason for adaptation - to win them to the Gospel  
Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, **to win as many as possible.** <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, **to win the Jews.** To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), **so as to win those under the law.** <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), **so as to win those not having the law.** <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, **to win the weak.** I have become all things to all men **so that by all possible means I might save some.** <sup>23</sup> **I do all this for the sake of the gospel,** that I may share in its blessings. 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

1. The reason Paul contextualizes is not popularity or personal preference or to “fit in”
2. Paul contextualizes SO THAT people might come to Christ
3. He states this point 6 times!
4. This is a consistent theme for Paul

We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20

- a. A good ambassador must know and embrace the culture of his target audience
- b. We can not effectively minister the Gospel to people if we have no connection points

From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. <sup>28</sup> ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ Acts 17:26–28

- a. God has called us to this time and place - this culture - not another one or a past one
  - b. Notice that Paul knew and could quote their pagan poets, artists - even false worship songs!
  - c. Paul knew how to contextualize for the sake of the Gospel!
5. We must contextualize - for the sake of the Gospel
  6. We must contextualize - for the sake of our hearers

D. Paul was not Amish - nor should we be!

1. Paul did not just stay in his own cultural context
2. He contextualized his ministry to reach others
3. An Amish approach is contextualized to an extinct culture
4. Simply avoiding our current culture is not faithfulness - it is ensuring ineffectiveness

### III. Christians - Called To Not Conform

A. Paul did not compromise God’s truth to contextualize  
To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. 1 Corinthians 9:20–21

1. Note Paul’s qualifiers to contextualization
2. He will contextualize for those under the law - but he is not
3. He will contextualize for those not under the law - but he is still responsible to God’s law

B. The danger of contextualizing - conformity to the world  
**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,** but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

1. We must not ever become conformed to the world - literally the ‘age’

2. Our age - like every other - will try to make us conform to it in our very ESSENCE

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. James 4:4

1. There is a basic antithesis between this world - including our own age - and God
2. We must never allow the world to capture our hearts

C. Paul was not the Borg - nor should we be!

1. Paul did not just assimilate everything around him
2. He distinguished between things which were indifferent and those that were not
3. We can not simply swallow everything our culture throws at us - much of it may be destructive
4. Even what we do adopt must never control our hearts - only God should have our heart

#### **IV. Contextualizing Without Conforming**

- A. This is another example of 'in the world but not of it'
- B. Some things are easy - clearly commanded or forbidden by God - example - temple prostitutes
- C. But much of life has no direct command from God - how do we decide?
- D. The false easy paths - no contextualization, full conformity
- E. The key - recognizing motives, spiritual realities

F. Two examples: food sacrificed to idols, circumcision

1. Food sacrificed to idols - 1 Cor 8-10
  - a. Simple answers - never, always
  - b. Paul - it depends on circumstances, motives
2. Circumcision - Acts 16 & Galatians 2
  - a. Paul circumcised Timothy - Acts 16
  - b. Paul refused to circumcise Titus - Galatians 2
  - c. Depended on the circumstances, reasons
  - d. Also, Timothy was part Jewish - Titus was not

G. Much of this series is aimed at helping us contextualize without conforming to the iWorld

#### **V. Applying the Word In the iWorld**

- A. Do I contextualize to my own world?
  1. All believers are called to a particular time, place, culture
  2. Am I a faithful part of my own culture?
  3. Or do I speak and act as if I long for another time?
  4. Do I look for ways to build bridges - for the Gospel's sake?
  5. Do I look for ways to build bridges - for my neighbors sake?
  6. Realize that false stereotypes of Christians can undermine effective ministry
- B. Do I go beyond contextualization into conformity?

1. The world is always out to subvert our hearts
2. It is a short step from contextualization to conformity
3. Am I willing to walk out of step with the culture where God commands?
4. Do I practice thoughtful discernment regarding our culture - or just go with the flow?
5. Are there any areas where I love the culture more than God and His Gospel?

C. A prayer for contextualization without conformity

### Contextualizing Without Conforming

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

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Prayer

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. 1 Corinthians 9:19–23