

Contextualizing the Gospel

IFI Training Day 2016

We cannot change the gospel. If we did it would no longer be the gospel. However, understanding how we have contextualized the gospel and the context of others as much as possible is imperative to good communication of the gospel.

"Contextualization involves an attempt to present the Gospel in a culturally relevant way."

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/october/what-is-contextualization.html>

While this is admirable, the fact is we only know our own culture well and most of the time do not even realize the ways that our culture conditions us. It is like being aware of the air around us. It is always there, affects our lives every area, but most of the time we don't think about it too much. We sometimes learn some things about other cultures, but relating the Gospel "in a culturally relevant way" would be nearly impossible. We can however reduce the culture baggage and do our best to relate the gospel as simply as possible and let people in different cultures express the message in a way that is relevant to their culture.

Task:

After reading the text, list points you agree with and points you disagree with and why. List areas of our lives that you can think of that are affected by our culture. We will take about 7 minutes and have at least one group share.

Task:

Using only what you find in the bible, describe the 1) basic message of the gospel, and 2) What the American culture has added, taken away, over-emphasized or under-emphasized in regard to the gospel, if anything. Take about 7 to 10 minutes, this is not an in-depth study, but what comes to mind from what you know. Have someone take notes; we will have a couple of groups share their observations.

CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS- Words and meanings

Manobo example: Manama killing his son to drink his blood.

Some people object to using Isa al Masih to name Jesus or Allah to name God.

The word "God" is not a biblical term.

In places where there are both Hindus and Muslims the Hindu translation of the bible uses a name for God that is from their list of deities. This can cause rejection of the biblical message by Muslims based on the fact that this is just one of many "gods" in the Hindu tradition.

Task:

Discuss these questions:

- Should we use local words for biblical concepts, like the name of God and give them biblical content?
- Should we avoid the use of local words that may bring misunderstanding to the message, at least initially?

Note the prevailing opinion of the group. We will take about 5 minutes on this and try to give each group a chance to share.

This task presents one of the challenges of contextualization. So how do we contextualize the gospel to be best understood in any culture?

CONTEXTUALIZING THE GOSPEL- A Case for Discovery Bible Study to present the gospel as free as possible from our own cultural baggage so that it can be understood and relate to any culture.

What comes to your mind when you hear the words "Bible Stories" ?

The gospel message is embedded in a historical and cultural context. Open your bible to any one of the gospels. Read until you find a reference to an Old Testament place, person, concept or quote. How far did you read?

75% of the bible is narrative. The Epistles are in the context of the Old Testament and the story of Jesus.

The whole narrative. **The gospel is in the context of the whole story that starts in Genesis and ends in Revelations.** World View is a major element of culture; if there is to be a world-view change that is evidence of real faith, we have to attempt to present the gospel in way it can be understood and give answers the basic worldview questions:

- God-who is God, what is He like?
- Identity-who are we?
- Meaning and purpose-why were we created? What is our purpose?
- Determining right and wrong-How do we determine right and wrong?
- Destiny- What is our destiny?

The gospel presented outside of its own context can be confusing and misinterpreted. "Conversion" without worldview change is syncretism.

HOW DO WE PRESENT THE STORY OF SALVATION WITHOUT OUR OWN CULTURAL BAGGAGE AND IN A WAY THAT THOSE OF OTHER CULTURES CAN UNDERSTAND IT?

With new people, START FROM THE BEGINNING and work progressively through the main Old Testament account, focusing on key events.

Read or tell the story **without adding** material from outside the text.

Give plenty of time for people to examine the story, make sure they understand it by having them retell it.

Ask basic questions that focus on the primary meaning of the text:

- What does this story reveal to us about God?
- What does this story reveal to us about humanity?
- We believe this story is true, if it is, how does this change your life, what will you do this week in response to this?
- Who will you share this story with?

Do not share your commentary. This is where your cultural understandings may come in.

Let the bible speak and the Holy Spirit give understanding.

Context builds as learners discover more.

This is not the only way we teach believers to study the bible, it is the way we allow people to discover God and fall in love with Jesus, and we always ask, what will you do to obey this, who will you share this with, because these are biblical imperatives.

Task:

Discuss and list underlying assumptions of the Discovery Bible Study approach.

List ones that you feel are valid, and ones that you think may not be valid and why.

Discuss the importance of world-view change and share your thoughts.