

Christ Community Covenant Church
Back to School: Changing our culture one good deed at a time
Pastor Dave Scherrer - August 25, 2013

Last week we spoke of our concerns about going back to school, in a dangerous world we like to think that school is safe. But Columbine has taught us that there are no safe places anymore. Supermarkets, malls, churches, college campus, elementary schools, theaters, even military graduations have all been the target of violence in recent years. And physical violence is only a part of it. There is a moral drift that is killing our nation and our culture that is every bit as destructive. But Jesus tells us there is hope:

Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

I wanted to dive a little deeper so I invited a panel of experts in the field of education to come and help us this morning. They are going to explain everything:

A Panel of Experts

Rick Gager, Bill and Robin Welsh, Pete Buchwald

1. Tell me a little bit about your teaching circumstances.
2. What issues do you see in your education experience that concerns you for your students?
This could be everything from school politics, funding issues, kids that don't care, parents that don't care, hungry kids, students that need tutors, etc.).
3. As a teacher in the classroom, is it possible for you to explore your spiritual testimony? Do you agree with Pastor John Piper that the reason we teach kids to read is so that they can learn to read the Bible or is there something else?
4. What are some of the things that encourage you about where education is going or can go?
(Partnering with the community, computers in the classroom, parents getting involved, student led campus Christian expressions, etc.).
5. How do you think a Christian or a church can contribute to the school in their neighborhood, can make a positive influence for Christ? (Pray for them, get involved in a class, tutor, Young Life, help teachers, etc.).

Thank you!

Making an impact on the culture

Christ gives us a blueprint for changing our schools and streets and jails and families. We shared it earlier in the service and I want to go back to it:

Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Let's break this down just a little bit. I think it is a pretty important verse when it comes to our back to school conversation. You see the issue with the ills in the world isn't only the covert fall of the systems but a failure of the good people in the world to address them. The failures are many, from sending kids to school without breakfast to then teaching hard truths about life without the moral compass to negotiate that world.

Jesus made it clear; in a dark world we are the answer.

“You are the light of the world”

That is an interesting statement in that Jesus said something a bit different regarding ‘light’:

John 8:12

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Again here Jesus makes it clear that followers of Christ have the light of Christ. We are indeed the light of the world because the one who is the true light is in us and we are hidden in Him. That now makes us His light on earth. But in a dark world the good people need leadership. They need a rallying voice. That voice is the church.

This is the good news but apparently there is a threat to our effectiveness of shining in darkness:

“Let your light not be hidden” but instead “shine”

Our tendency is to think to ourselves, “This is a matter between them and God. I don’t have a role to play in this conversation.” Or “I feel funny talking about God,” either ashamed or you feel under qualified. The apostle Paul say the same thing in his times and encouraged his friends in Rome to be bold and to live bold lives:

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

How does light shine? Through “good works” that glorify God

It has been said that Jesus had this idea figured out; first He showed that he could be trusted with the people’s physical needs, then he went on to greater needs – the dealing with the need to deal with sin. I’m not sure I quite believe that chronology as a solid fact, but it is in part true. Jesus demonstrated his authority through various signs, and in doing so He established His spiritual authority as well.

Luke 7:22

²² And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.

How are “good works” done that give glory to God?

How are “good works” done that give glory to God?
Done in His Character: with Love, Mercy, Grace, Truth,
Done in His Way: Incarnational ministry without judgment
Done for His Sake: With God receiving the glory and the profit

Christians stay when others run!

Famine and war had recently afflicted Caesarea, so when the plague hit in the early fourth century, the populace was already weakened and unable to withstand this additional blow. The populace began fleeing the city, one of the larger ones of the Roman Empire, for safety in the countryside. However, in the midst of the fleeing inhabitants; at least one group was staying behind, the Christians. Bishop of the city and historian of the early church, Eusebius, recorded that during the plague, “All day long some of them [the Christians] tended to the dying and to their burial, countless numbers with no one to care for them.

Others gathered together from all parts of the city a multitude of those withered from famine and distributed bread to them all.”

Cities in the ancient world were even more overcrowded than the densest population centers today. With few sewers existing, cities were filthy beyond imagining and became a breeding ground for disease. Major catastrophes were not uncommon, including fires, plagues, conquests by armies, and frequent earthquakes. Even though the cities were unpleasant places to live, they were the population and intellectual centers of the empire, and they provided Christians with opportunities for numerical growth and cultural influence.

However, the Christian conquest of the Roman Empire came not by the sword, but by the preaching of the gospel joined with acts of compassion. Eusebius goes on to state that because of their compassion in the midst of the plague, the Christians’ “deeds were on everyone’s lips, and they glorified the God of the Christians. Such actions convinced them that they alone were pious and truly reverent to God.” A few decades after Eusebius, the last pagan emperor, Julian the Apostate, recognized that the Christian practice of compassion was one cause behind the transformation of the faith from a small movement on the edge of the empire to cultural ascendancy.

Writing to a pagan priest, he said, “When it came about that the poor were neglected and overlooked by the [pagan] priests, then I think the impious Galileans [i.e., Christians] observed this fact and devoted themselves to philanthropy.” To another, he wrote, “They support not only their poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.” In fact, Julian proposed that pagan priests imitate the Christians’ charity in order to bring about a revival of paganism in the empire.

Christianity presented to the ancient world two theological truths that were not to be found in the pagan religions. The first is that the God of Jesus Christ is a God worth dying for, since He had first demonstrated His love for humanity by sending His Son. The second truth was a “new conception of humanity,” that is, the idea that all human beings have special dignity and should therefore be shown compassion. These two ideas slowly but surely transformed the culture of the Roman Empire. Today, as the West appears to be returning to paganism, the distinctiveness of the Christian doctrines of God and of man will once more stand in stark contrast to the surrounding culture by Christians demonstrating the love of Christ in acts of compassion.