

Faith Formation in a Secular World – Brentwood Hills church of Christ, Fall 2018

Lesson Two: Living the Ways of Jesus in a Non-transcendent “Immanent Frame.”

Immanent frame (from Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*) This is a closed world structure, it does not allow for a metaphysical reality, nothing is transcendent. It provides a conceptual language house, social imaginary – it is the assumed presupposition in culture. The result is a “Nova effect” – the explosion of religious and spiritual possibilities are now endless. Everyone decides what they want to believe based on what they *feel* is authentic. It is the result of an expressive individualism that insists there is nothing there beyond what we make it (no ontological reality beyond one’s own epistemology). I make myself as well as the reality in which I choose to live.

So we currently live in a culture that is identified as post-truth. For the “post-truth” person, there is no reality beyond their feelings.

What one chooses to believe is their faith. Faith is that which defines the reality in which we choose to live. Note that it is not faith vs. reason. Reason itself is an act of faith.

How do you know your “functioning belief system?” Faith is that which gets me up in the morning. I have a narrative into which I will live. Everyone has a system of faith – it forms our values and our goals. Into what narrative do you awake? In today’s culture, we are experiencing the “nova effect” of radical expressive individualism. Everyone believes what they want to believe. How, then, should we present the gospel?

Tonight’s study outline:

We no longer live in a culture that privileges Christianity

Studies show precipitous decline in those claiming Christian faith or even association with the Christian faith.

Moral failures of Christian leaders, scandals of child abuse, etc.

Advances in naturalism, aggressive New Atheism...

For many, pragmatic decision to walk away – “my former faith did not serve me well...”

New classification – apetheists – general malaise, loss of hope

This culture is deeply influencing our youth

Secular 2 institutions of faith will not call them back to faithfulness – they are not equipped or designed to do so. So, then, what can we do?

Convergence of Experiences...

For almost 20 years I have taught courses in apologetics. Incredible change in our student body.

For years, students divided into groups – made compelling presentations on reasons to believe in God and Christ. But the “needle” didn’t move...

Mark Scandrette, Practicing the Way of Jesus. Idea of “do-jo’s”

Began, 7 years ago, new approach – practicing way of Jesus in community

Paradoxical teachings. If indeed the Word made flesh, experientially must be verifiable. We are a research university, let’s put it to the test...

Similar to amazing stories of our athletes who have come to faith.

Challenge: Why did Jesus come, and what does Jesus expect of us as his followers? What is our role in the mission of God?

The Challenge of Primary Identity...

Who are you? What narrative are you participating in to produce what you want to become?

What is your functional 2nd order story? (not your “stated” faith)

Homework from last week – how do you spend your money, time, emotions, imagination, and concerns? Are you shaped by the world or the redemptive, transformative story of being a “living sacrifice?”

If someone followed you around for a week, what story would your life tell?

Consideration of identity texts in 1 Peter 1 and 2.

“A call to arms” 1 Peter 1:13-16

Identity in the world – 1 Peter 2:9-12

Be aware of the consequences - 1 Peter 2:20-25

Excerpts from the letter to Diognetus: (circa 130-200 A.D.)

Christians are not distinguished from other men by country, language, nor by the customs which they observe. They do not inhabit cities of their own, use a particular way of speaking, nor lead a life marked out by any curiosity. The course of conduct they follow has not been devised by the speculation and deliberation of inquisitive men. They do not, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of merely human doctrines.

Instead, they inhabit both Greek and barbarian cities, however things have fallen to each of them. And it is while following the customs of the natives in clothing, food, and the rest of ordinary life that they display to us their wonderful and admittedly striking way of life.

They live in their own countries, but they do so as those who are just passing through. As citizens they participate in everything with others, yet they endure everything as if they were foreigners. Every foreign land is like their homeland to them, and every land of their birth is like a land of strangers. They marry, like everyone else, and they have children, but they do not destroy their offspring. They share a common table, but not a common bed.

They exist in the flesh, but they do not live by the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, all the while surpassing the laws by their lives. They love all men and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned. They are put to death and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich. They lack everything, yet they overflow in everything.

They are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor they are glorified; they are spoken ill of and yet are justified; they are reviled but bless; they are insulted and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evildoers; when punished, they rejoice as if raised from the dead. They are assailed by the Jews as barbarians; they are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to give any reason for their hatred.

To sum it all up in one word, what the soul is in the body, that is what Christians are in the world.

How is the Christian Church Known in Today's World?

The survey says...

Our calling? Not to be counter-cultural, but to be an alternative culture.

We live the ways of Jesus in communities of faith, holding one another accountable.

What did Jesus come to do? In John 17 – Jesus says his work is finished!
As he was sent, we are sent.

We are called to bear faithful witness to the master narrative (next week's study).

We are called to declare there is only one God (purpose to live, our highest value) and that

Jesus is indeed the Christ (the true manifestation of life).

The Missing Peace? (note, “peace” is intentional) The Work of the Holy Spirit

Here introducing topic that we will explore more fully in coming weeks...

Jesus prayer in John 17 follows powerful explanation of the coming Spirit of God – the *paracletos* – the One to walk beside us and guide us to peace (shalom).

Our problem of Aristotelian self-actualization.

Jesus demonstrates to us how to live a life led by the Holy Spirit.

Not possible with ego-centric life – so we each must die...

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20)

Walk not according to the flesh (the ego-centric life) but according to the Spirit. You are living in the realm of the Spirit (Romans 8:1-11)

Review and Homework (Again?)

Difficult challenge – presenting the Gospel of God’s kingdom in a world that ridicules transcendence. Our advantage? The Spirit dwells in us...

People believe what they believe because they find it to be true – it is the best narrative they know.

They will stay where they are until convinced there is a better story that promises a better outcome, and gives life meaning and purpose now.

What does “the Jesus life” look like for you?

Choose a paradoxical teaching of Jesus and put it to the test: (examples)

Live in such a way that you hold no ill will towards anyone. Resolve...restore...

Rather than retaliating, show acts of generous kindness towards “enemies.”

Help someone in a meaningful way that has nothing to give back...

Put the needs of others ahead of your own.

Bibliography of cited resources

Kinnaman, David and Gabe Lyons. *unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters* (Baker Books: 2012)

Murray, Abdu. *Saving Truth: Finding Meaning & Clarity in a Post-Truth World* (Zondervan: 2018)

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press: 2007)

_____. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Harvard University Press: 1992)

Twenge, Jean. *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (Atria Books, Revised Edition: 2014).

White, James Emery. *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Baker Books: 2017)