

The Culture of the Kingdom The Apostles Doctrine

Studio Session 140

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How did the early church - comprised of Jew and Gentile - accomplish this stunning feat of taking very diverse people; Jew, Gentile, various kinds of Gentiles and form them together in one corporate whole that was characterized by love for one another that was uncommon for the ancient world, so that when there was a famine in Jerusalem, brethren who were not Jewish – in places as far away as Macedonia, Corinth – would send enough relief to take care of the needs of the brethren in Jerusalem? How could such a thing have happened? Today, in the same city, there will be congregations of the same church and they will not respond to the needs of each other. In a classic situation, in the same city you may have people of the same race, belonging to the same denomination, who if there arises a problem in one congregation, will actually not consider sending help or aid or be involved with to bring healing and restoration or reconciliation with another of their own denomination....of the same race of people. It's nearly a given that where the races are different, that no other consideration predominates. So if there is a black baptist church in town and a white baptist church in town and there are problems in one, the other will have no thought that it is their concern to lend aid and help or comfort. And the baptists are not alone in this, every denomination is pretty much like this.

How did the first century church accomplish this stunning change, wherein that they loved each other the world was astonished? How could that have happened? We have not grown in regard to this matter, historically, we have regressed. What was it that caused these very diverse people – racially diverse, spiritually diverse, different backgrounds culturally and so on people in Macedonia, Corinth having nothing in common particularly with each other and less in common with the brethren in Jerusalem than they might have had in common with each other. Yet they sent sustained relief – not a once in a while, take up some offerings – they sent sustained relief to alleviate the problems caused by famine in Jerusalem. How did that happen? The answer is first and foremost and at the core, they came into the culture of the kingdom. They were different. Once they crossed over, being released from the domain of darkness into the kingdom, they came to be immediately exposed to a culture that taught them that they were one people. They were not Jew, they were not Gentile, they were not bond, they were not free, these issues of....now practically they remained Jew or Gentile. So someone who was a Jew didn't

cease being a Jew; he was a Jew but it didn't matter that he was a Jew. Male or female; they remained male and female but it didn't matter to each other. They'd come into a culture where these human distinctions were secondary considerations and definitely not outcome determinative of the way of life of these believers. Quite literally, they came into a different society.

Here is the clue. Turn with me to the book of Acts chapter 2 verse 42, speaking of how 3000 were added to their numbers that day, that's the day of Pentecost. And right after that, "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Four things, these were the four cultural imperatives of the kingdom, "They devoted themselves," devoted themselves. That means that this was more than a casual dalliance, this was not going to a conference and hearing an exciting speaker and coming away all impressed and then turning around in the next month or two or three and going to another exciting conference with dynamic speakers. No, "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching." It meant that the apostles had a special and particular place among them and the church did not see that it's responsibility was to feed itself, as the current church does. We've become consumers and preachers have become marketers, they have ideas to be marketed to the consumers and the consumers decide what they want to hear, what they want to read, what they want to practice. There is no supervision of the growth of the average church member. We are, for all intents and purposes unpastored, because the pastor is typically someone who attends to the requirements of the administration of the group and this is increasing problematic.

I said to a group of pastors recently in an eastern city, I said, "You are deceiving yourselves if you think that the people sitting in the pew get their information primarily from you. That may have been the case at another time, but not now, not with information being available on demand through the computer, a keystroke away opens a world of information to whoever wants it. And most preachers cannot compete with the quality and the content of what's available on the website. People are not coming to the churches because they can't get information anywhere else, they're coming because of something else, they're looking for relational fellowship. But that's typically not what's offered and the illusion continues to be maintained that they're coming for information. If you were to pole the people in the pews and ask them what they believed on nearly any subject, most preachers would be shocked to find out that the people in the pews do not hold their views on nearly anything. Why? Because this is not the time where information is the stock and trade of the pulpit, because of the Internet. We are, after all, in the information age. Well, preachers sometimes are slow to wake up to these things and will consider this an assault on their validity. But that's just how closed the loop is and how closed the thinking is, it doesn't make it different than that it just makes it, they're trying to hold back the tide. This is just the beginning of the Information Age, things aren't going to get better, people aren't going to come back from searching the web to listening to what a preacher has to say on Sunday morning; that box is opened and the

people are gone, they will not come back to that kind of fellowship.

Now the early church was not based purely on information, but information was a critical function of the early church but it wasn't just anybody's notion or anybody's view, it was the apostles' doctrine. There will never be a replacement for truth. The Internet is not about truth itself, it's about the distribution of ideas, there will always be the need for content and increasingly, the need for relevant content. Whereas before, by tradition or by inertia, people kept coming to a particular church to get the information that related to their choice.

The generation that has arisen now is on an endless quest for truth. They're not just seeking information, they're looking for ways now newer and newer technologies are being developed, to allow them to search the hundred million web sites to find relevant information, relevant to what they're looking for. That information and its relevance comes through something called 'the apostolic'. Which means that there are apostles today. Many churches have dispensed with the apostolic in their decision and their desire to avoid hierarchies and to act more 'democratically'. Churches have made themselves to be places where people can come under any pretext and get as much or as little as they want to and are encouraged to give some money to keep that function going.

The early church was not at all like this, this is a modern invention and the fact is, it has ceased to be the point of dissemination of relevant truth. Increasingly, what is said in the pulpit has more of a sociological impact, if that. Commonly what is said is meant to be a fundraiser of some kind, mostly to build new wings to the existing property and so on. Most religious groups understand that the way to hold people in place is to have them be so indebted to a building fund and with that the guilt factor that says "We're building this for you," to hold people in place because once people have contributed money to a thing...oddly enough, the way that the human psyche sometimes works is that they don't want to leave and not realize the full outcome of their investment. And cunning and clever pastors know exactly how to make that work to keep longevity going and so on. It's the vanity of many who desire to have the biggest building in town, the most opulent, going to the 'happeningist' and so on.

All of these things bear no relevance to truth. It's just like, "Who's team is the winning team this year?" And next year there will be a challenger, it may be the next winning team. It's the psychology of sports and the 'group think' that is the foundation of most of what calls itself church today. The early church experienced a genuine transformation in the thinking of the people because there was a genuine transformation in the culture of those people when they made contact with the kingdom. And the first cultural change centered around apostles, "The people continued steadfastly..." not 'casually', not 'occasionally', not by happenstance, not when they wanted to, not when it was convenient, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."

Now, the word 'apostolos' means "one sent". That means there's somebody who sends the one who is sent and it means the one who is sent is sent to do the will of the one who sent him. So Jesus would say, "If you receive Me, you receive the One who sent Me." Democracy has invaded the kingdom, has invaded the peoples thinking about the kingdom, to state it more precisely. And there are many purveyors of a democratic ideal who think that that somehow empowers and enables the people. What it does is that it enslaves them to the commonality of 'group think' without materially altering their understanding of the truth. We're not in a democracy when we come to the kingdom; we are in a kingdom that has a King. And no one in the kingdom is asked to vote on what is the truth; what you believe or do not believe as an individual is irrelevant when you come to the kingdom because all belief structures have been preempted. You have the freedom to decide whether or not you believe but you do not have the freedom to decide what you believe. What you believe has been preempted, whether or not you believe it is the only choice in the matter that you have. Jesus does not evolve what He's going to say or what He has said on the basis of popular appeal; He is the King. He could not care less what social developments have come in a nation and what the people would listen to and what the people demand by way of social change.

You see, He knows the end from the beginning, whereas we are just day trippers, we are in our day. But He knows what came before, He knows what is now and He knows what is coming. So He knows exactly how to position His people, He knew that before He created the worlds, so that's why He doesn't have to accommodate to the whim of changing societies. And any preacher or any religious group or any groups of preachers and/or religious groups that do not see this but see that is their job to accommodate to the vagaries of the age, are foolish, they're foolish, because theirs is the gospel of the marketplace and it bears no relevance to the gospel of the kingdom.

Presently I'm watching as preachers align themselves with politicians to preach the gospel of green, in an attempt to remedy the voracious appetites of man who have chosen not to retain God in their knowledge and whose minds are reprobate who now come to worship the creation rather than the Creator and give themselves over to unnatural behaviors. We have no gospel to remediate a person who will not change from the reprobation of his mind to submit to the gospel of Christ, such a person is bound over for doom and destruction by their own decision and their salvation is to return to the LORD. Now I am not in anyway suggesting that the gospel that they've heard – the church gospel – was in fact the gospel. So there is that caveat. But what they desire the gospel to become in accommodation of perverse behavior resulting from reprobation of thinking, does not in fact constitute the true gospel and both those who teach such things and those who follow them (follow the things that are taught) are no better for either teaching or following. That's because there was the original concept of those sent from God, sent by Christ, to bring a message into the world to change the culture of mankind, to change the natural

ways that humans think and to reveal to them the supernatural so that they would have understanding of the things that God intended that they should know and understand.

Listen to this, from the book of Romans and this is in relevance to those who are sent. In Romans 10:17 it says, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message (or hearing the word) and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” King James puts it this way, “So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Now, the word of God comes...it says, “Consequently,” which means “As a result of what has been previously said, we may come to this conclusion that you have faith but because you have heard the word of God which comes to you.”

Now that leaves the question: How does the word of God come to you? Here is the answer to that question in terms of the origin. Verse 14, “How then, how then can they call on the One they have not believed in and how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard and how can they hear without someone preaching to them and how can they preach unless they be sent as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.' ” And then it goes on to say, “As a result,” (or consequently), “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”

Now let's backup and put this in an overall context. Scriptures say, “Man does not live on bread alone,” this is said in the Old Testament; it's said in the New Testament, “Man does not live on bread alone.” In Deuteronomy God concludes through Moses, God concludes that the purpose for the journey of Israel in the wilderness – Deuteronomy 8 – was that they would be taught this one truth: Man does not live on bread alone, he lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Jesus responds to Satan, who tempts Him in the wilderness by saying to Satan, “Man does live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

So faith comes by hearing, not by reading, not by seeing but by hearing because there is an intended message to come from the mouth of God to the ear of man. And this word coming from the mouth of God to the ear of man is meant to function as bread for the spirit, food for the spirit. “Man does not live on bread alone, he lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Now, that word, when it hits your ear, produces faith. So then, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. How does the word come from the mouth of God to your ear? The answer: How can they believe on one whom they have not heard and how can they hear without a preacher? There's one who is sent to preach. The One who sends him is God, what he comes to bring is the word of God in the season and that's the word of God that comes from God's mouth to your ear because the mouth of the preacher is the substitute mouth of God. And then the rhetorical question: “How can he preach...” which means how can he bring this word from God unless God sent him? “How can he preach unless he be sent?” The word for “sent” in the Greek is the word “apostolos”; “one sent”.

I was traveling in Greece some time ago and saw on a mail truck - the truck that carried the mail - the word 'apostolos'. I asked my Greek interpreter what was the meaning of the word 'apostolos'. She smiled and said, "Oh, that's the mailman, that's the mailman, that's the person who delivers the mail." Who delivers the word from the mouth of God? Apostolos, the mailman, one sent. In the culture that ignores the apostles there is no current word from God. That which was spoken before of old, remains the tradition in it's human, carnal, earthly, fleshly first blush. And where religion has built up around the natural, there is no word from God that brings the rest of the story, that brings what the story means. Hence, in the previous expression of the parable of the good Samaritan, there was no way to connect what God was doing in the present to what had gone before. God sends someone to connect, that's the word that comes from the mouth of God to the ear of man and that's the word that produces faith.

The early church was led by apostles, not by pastors, but by apostles. Four principles - we'll continue our discussion - apostles doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers. These are the cultural imperatives of the kingdom. God is restoring those things to the church in our time. Join me for the continuing discussion. I'm Sam Soleyn, I'll see you then, bye bye.