

How the Bible Contextualizes the Gospel

Talk 1: Reinterpreting Contextualization

Topic: Evangelism
Subject: How can we contextualize our presentations of the gospel?
Complement: Emphasize the elements that relate most to their culture.
Purpose: The listeners will present the gospel in a way that listeners understand the message clearly.

Introduction

1. Interest:
 - a) BS, Texas A & M (Phil. Of Math)
 - b) MDiv, Gordon-Conwell
 - c) PhD, SEBTS
 - d) Two Books: *One Gospel for All Nations, Saving God's Face* (jacksonwu.org)
 - e) Expertise: Romans, Honor-Shame
2. Need: People either don't grasp the gospel's meaning or significance, yet we tend to add to these problems by adding to or subtracting from the gospel. This is because all theology is contextualized.

I. We often overlook the details when sharing the gospel.

- A. We look at the same text but see differ things. What we affirm is not the problem. The problem is what we deny.
- B. Our cultural perspective hinders us from seeing some aspects of the gospel. So we need the humility to realize that we don't see the whole picture.
- C. The gospel transcends culture but it is always expressed in cultural terms from one culture to another because we cannot separate *how* we share the gospel with *what* we share.

II. Types of syncretism

- A. Cultural syncretism: For example, merging *Star Wars* and *Back to the Future*
- B. Theological syncretism: God is *both* judge and king
- C. Emphasis is also important:
 1. Q: Why did you marry your wife? A: Because she is a woman. This is essentially true but not meaningfully true.
 2. The 1996 Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals all signed the Cambridge Declaration that stood against all "isms" but not once mentioned the resurrection. They presented the gospel in such a narrow way that it compromised it.
 3. True enough is not good enough but

III. What organizing principles shape our “implicit gospel”?

- A. Arguing the individual over the group
- B. Our nature of the world emphasizes diversity over harmony
- C. Basis of identity overemphasizes difference over similarities
- D. The highest authority is seen as king, father or judge
- E. The moral standard: law (guilt), honor (group conformity), power (fear), tradition (ancestor or books)
- F. There are 96 possible combinations of the five above

IV. What implicit gospel do we preach?

- A. Contextualization is the process by which people interpret, communicate and apply the Bible within a particular cultural context.
- B. What we win them with is what we win them to (if we only tell them that Jesus will help them become prosperous, then they will fall away once difficulty comes).

V. How should we share the gospel

- A. Follow a framework, not a formula.
- B. It should be firm yet flexible.
- C. It should be biblically faithful and culturally meaningful.
- D. Sometimes we have to make something more complex before we can solve a problem.

VI. How the Bible relates to culture

- A. God uses cultural concepts to frame the revelation of his character, will and plans (contextualization is rooted as culture frames revelation that gives us the Bible).
- B. God revealed Himself through ancient cultures to all nations.
- C. Emphasis is inspired.

Conclusion

1. The Bible should shape our method and our message.
2. Scripture, not culture, forms the content of the gospel and its presentation
3. Culture acts as a lens for our interpretation
4. The Bible provides theological themes for the culture.
5. Exhortation
 - a) Scripture and culture are intertwined.
 - b) The Bible is rooted in history.
 - c) The Bible is not a theological abstraction.

Talk 2: How the Bible Contextualizes the Gospel

Topic:	Evangelism
Subject:	How does God contextualize the gospel in the Bible?
Complement:	He shows us the gospel in the context of creation, covenant and kingdom.
Purpose:	The listeners will emphasize creation, covenant and kingdom in gospel presentations.

Introduction

1. Interest: The Bible presents the gospel in various ways.
 - a) Galatians 3:8 says that the gospel is the Abrahamic Covenant
 - b) The sermons in Acts do not explicitly mention the cross, but that doesn't mean that they didn't believe it. They focus on the resurrection.
2. Need: How does the Bible help us see how to share our faith?
3. Subject: How does God contextualize the gospel in the Bible?
4. Background: The Bible itself gives us a firm and flexible message of the gospel
5. Preview: As all colors come from either red, yellow, or blue, so the Bible always qualifies the gospel in one of three ways: creation, covenant and kingdom.

I. The gospel has three key elements.**A. Creation (25 times in the NT = Land)**

1. Sovereignty of God
 - a) God rules over the entire world (Col. 1:5, 23)
 - b) Jesus is the firstborn over all creation (Col. 1:15).
2. Scope of the Kingdom
 - a) Paul's explanation references the OT (e.g., Acts 14:15-17)
 - b) "Behold your God" (Isa. 40:9) notes that since there is only one God, we should he alone reigns (Isa. 52:7).
 - c) Acts 17

B. Covenant (26 times = Citizens or Relationship)

1. Paul includes both the resurrection and David's offspring (2 Tim. 2:8).
2. Covenant clearly is the focus of the gospel to Galatia (Gal. 3:8).

C. Kingdom (93 times = King or Authority)

1. Paul's explanation of the gospel in terms of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:3-5) is in the context of all things being in subjection under Christ under his kingdom (vv. 24-28).
2. Romans 1:2-4 intermingles kingdom and covenant themes by noting the Davidic covenant.

3. Paul notes that the gospel was promised to the Jewish fathers (Acts 13:32-33).

Note that these overlap so see the iPhone picture taken of the overlapping circles.

II. The Gospel is not a “how to” message.

- A. Even the Roman Caesar proclaimed the “gospel” in AD 9 in the idea of the birth of a king. The Gospel is a Royal Declaration!
- B. It is not the message of *how* we get saved. It is the message we must believe *in order to* be saved.
- C. What is that gospel message?
 1. God is king.
 2. All nations have a common origin.
 3. Anyone can be saved (Rom. 3:27-30).
- D. We must keep the creation-covenant-kingdom balance.
 1. The Four Laws emphasize that we decide whether Christ is Lord of our lives through the two circles when he actually *already* is Lord. The issue is whether we recognize and admit that he is king.
 2. It is improper to ask which of these three are most important since they are all vital, just as a mother and father are both vital to parenting.
 3. We need both framework and function.
 - a) For example, three stories all are romantic tragedies (framework) where a couple falls in love but others seek to separate them to the extent that one dies: *Geisha*, *Titanic*, and *Romeo & Juliet*.
 - b) To argue only from framework, one would be saying that these tell the same story.
 4. The three blind men examining an elephant does not illustrate relativism, as the elephant is actually static and actual. What it better shows is how each of us does not fully see the Bible (the elephant). It also shows that that these men are blind but they need not be mute. They are free to talk to each other to share the part of the elephant that they touch.

Conclusion

1. Emphasize creation, covenant and kingdom in your gospel presentations (MI).
2. Illustration by respondent Derek Brotherson (OT prof in Bandung with OMF)
 - a) Animists come to Christ because Jesus is proven more powerful than their spirits, but then they often don't see him any better than a powerful spirit.
 - b) Muslims desire forgiveness, so they trust Christ for forgiveness but then do not confess him before their family in full discipleship.
 - c) Should we use the Discovery Bible Study Method where learners must find truth themselves from the Bible without the missionary teaching them?

- (1) Answer: We need to teach people exegetical skills rather than teach them theology without showing where we got this.
- (2) We also need to lead people towards a goal rather than just corral them and let them decide whatever they want about the Bible.

Talk 3: How Does the Bible Explain the Gospel?

Topic: Evangelism
Subject: How can we preach the right kind of gospel?
Complement: Interconnect cultural themes with biblical themes to speak in a culturally meaningful way without forsaking Scripture
Purpose: The listeners will preach the true gospel in a relevant way.

Introduction

1. Interest: Sound theology ministers to us (Charlie Brown cartoon).
2. Need: The Parable of the Soils in Mark 4 assumes that the sower spreads out good seed.
3. Subject: What kind of seed are we sowing? What kind of gospel are we preaching? How can we preach the right kind of gospel?
4. Background: We all contextualize, but do we only make relevant parts contextual?
 - a) For example, the wheat we eat today is not the same as the wheat of generations ago. It has been genetically altered so that it grows faster with larger heads. Therefore, the plants are much shorter now and compared to the original wheat, it is genetically so different that it exceeds the genetic distance than exists between chimps and humans. This produces wheat bellies unlike produced years ago.
 - b) Have we hybridized the gospel so that we are producing faster churches but with side effects such as fewer disciples and hampered families?
 - c) Healthy contextualization helps us plant healthy seed with humility.
5. Preview: Yesterday we identified biblical themes. But now we need to see how they function in a gospel presentation. How do we use explanation themes?
6. Text: Four questions in order...

I. Four Key Questions

- A. Who is Jesus?
- B. What has Jesus done?
- C. Why is he important?
- D. How do we respond?

II. The Gospel & Salvation

- A. If we preach salvation, are we preaching the gospel? Not necessarily.
- B. The gospel and the doctrine of salvation are not the same but they overlap.
- C. The gospel is not merely the message how one gets saved. Rather, it is the message one must believe in order to be saved.
- D. We need to help people see the big picture of the Bible rather than the various pieces. Connect the dots within a large picture

III. Shame & Guilt

- A. Guilt is about what we do while shame is about who we are.
- B. Chinese speak of face, but honor and shame is more holistic.
- C. How does one get honor (public worth) and/or shame?
 - 1. Ascribed: Gender, nationality, who we know (Eastern), relational, sacred space, purity
 - 2. Achieved: Individual distinctions, grades, schooling, education, what we do (Western)
- D. Contextualization is empathetic.
- E. All cultures are honor/shame cultures: Facebook, “likes,” Twitter, sports, Pinterest, gangs, military, blaming or honoring the team even though you aren’t on that team itself. Whose approval do you seek? Do you ask forgiveness? Where have you felt left behind? What do you base your identity on? How do you seek face? Are you afraid of being overlooked? What do you do when you are betrayed?
- F. What is an honor-shame perspective?
 - 1. “What is standard” or should be, what is natural
 - 2. “What is social” or relational, who approves of us
 - 3. “What is sovereign” or hierarchical, who is the boss

IV. The Process of Contextualizing the Gospel

- A. Identify biblical themes: the framework themes of creation, covenant, and especially kingdom
- B. Interconnect cultural themes: speak in a culturally meaningful way without forsaking Scripture

Conclusion

- 1. How can we preach the right kind of gospel?
- 2. Interconnect cultural themes with biblical themes to speak in a culturally meaningful way without forsaking Scripture (MI).

Talk 4: A Practical Approach To Biblical Contextualization

Topic:	Evangelism
Subject:	How can we interpret Scripture using a cultural lens?
Complement:	Interpret Scripture with a broader cultural lens and then infer the gospel to the culture.
Purpose:	The listeners will broaden the way they look at Scripture rather than only seeing it through their own cultural lens.

Introduction

1. Interest: Now we address steps 3-4 of the process (see 3c and 3d below).
2. Subject: How can we interpret Scripture using a cultural lens (how can we see our culture or someone else's culture in the Bible)?
3. The Process of Contextualizing the Gospel (Four Stages)
 - a) Identify biblical themes: the framework themes of creation, covenant, and especially kingdom
 - b) Interconnect cultural themes: speak in a culturally meaningful way without forsaking Scripture
 - c) Interpret Scripture with a broadened cultural lens (exegetical contextualization, or interpreting Scripture from a local cultural perspective)
 - d) Infer the significance of the gospel in the culture.
4. Background: Biblical writers do this.
 - a) The OT prophets continually use honor-shame language.
 - b) Stephen doesn't mention the Exodus in Acts 7 as it doesn't fit his purpose to show the stubbornness of Israel.

I. Interpret Scripture with a broadened cultural lens (step 3).

- A. Exegetical contextualization, or interpreting Scripture from a local cultural perspective
- B. What cultural ideas will clarify biblical themes?

II. Infer the significance of the gospel in the culture (step 4).

- A. This refers to the interpretation of culture from a biblical perspective.
- B. This doesn't misinterpret the Bible but sees things that one did not see before. For example, "house church" in Chinese is actually "family church"!
- C. It sees the culture more clearly by having a biblical lens.

III. Practice

- A. What is the cultural significance of son of God? Filial piety
- B. What is the cultural significance of the law?
- C. What is the cultural significance of circumcision?

- D. What is the cultural significance of faith? Loyalty
- E. What is the cultural significance of the Abrahamic Covenant? Blood line
- F. What is the cultural significance of ethnocentrism?
- G. What is the cultural significance of the excesses of filial piety? Idolatry, Lord
- H. What is the cultural significance of the excesses of seeking face?
- I. What is the cultural significance of spirit worship? Image of God, light and darkness, authority

IV. The Gospel shapes worldview.

Creation	Standard	Holiness	Purity
Covenant	Social		
Kingdom			

A. Creation

1. Truth

- a) The Creator is the world's only God
- b) He is king
- c) The Creator-God is God of all nations
- d) He determines how the world works.
- e) The Creator-God deserves all praise, loyalty and love.

2. Application

- a) World's Key Problem: In an unsaved person's worldview, what does he/she see as the world's main problem? Start with that problem and show how the Bible resolves that problem.
- b) Call to Repentance: How do people express repentance?
- c) Cost: What is the cost of following Christ in the local culture? What biblical principles help people to be willing to pay the cost?
- d) Purity:
 - (1) God purifies his people of shameful impurity.
 - (2) God grants us his Holy Spirit.
 - (3) The Bible calls God' people "a temple"
 - (4) All of our life should be reckoned worship.
 - (5) Believers have a calling as a royal priesthood.
 - (6) Our lives should reflect God's presence.

- (7) Protect God's sacred space.
- (8) How do the people use "holiness" or "purity" language?
- (9) What behaviors make the church look impure?

B. Covenants

1. Covenants primarily concern relationships.
2. Collective identity results from covenants.
3. These result in traditions.
4. Identify
 - a) How do people define "insiders" and "outsiders"?
 - b) With whom do people identify?
 - c) What are the boundary markers that explain why people wear different clothes and act differently?

C. Kingdom

1. Idolatry is rebellion against the king.
2. Implications
 - a) In your ministry context, who has the authority?
 - b) What do the authorities require of people?
 - c) How do people decide social hierarchy?
 - d) How do people use their power?

Conclusion

1. Honor and shame are intrinsic to the gospel (MI).
2. If we aren't preaching honor and shame, we are not preaching the gospel!
3. How do we know if contextualization is working? We really don't know, but there are some indicators.
 - a) No
 - (1) We decrease false professions and easy-believism.
 - (2) We decrease confusion (e.g., "the gospel is just to make us wealthy").
 - (3) We decrease syncretism (in John 6, Jesus saw large crowds so said hard words to decrease the crowd by thinning out those who only wanted bread).
 - b) Yes
 - (1) Increases clarity and meaning
 - (2) Increases motivation to obey

- (3) Increases longevity or endurance of faith
 - (4) Increases character fruit
 - (5) Increases the number of genuine Christians because successful contextualization makes disciples
4. We must be faithful and concerned about quality rather than quantity. Are people paying attention? Are they listening? Are they growing into the image of Christ?