

## **Gospel Light in Dark and Troubled Times**

### ***The Ferguson Aftermath***

As I sit at my desk to write this article, the ashes are still smoldering from many of the fires of the burned down buildings in and around Ferguson, Missouri in the aftermath of the decision by a grand jury not to indict police officer Darren Wilson in the shooting death of Michael Brown. The issues at hand and the solutions that are given to those issues are often as varied as the number of people that you talk with in a given day. To be sure there are no easy answers to any of the larger, practical issues connected to this tragic situation. My intent in this article is not to second guess the grand jury's decision, choose sides, or to offer surface solutions to problems that have surely existed in our culture for more years than we may want to admit.

Having said that, how can Christians make a lasting difference in the culture in which we live? How can we seek to offer solutions to the problems that our culture faces rather than contributing to the problems? In his little book entitled, *Chameleon Christianity*, author Dick Keyes points out that sociologists teach us that certain dissonant groups with distinct belief systems within the larger society will react to reduce potential for friction in two predictable ways. One is to compromise their distinctive beliefs and way of life so that they can reduce their conflict with society. The second is to tribalize. This is a word that means to retreat within their own group and thus effectively lose contact with society.

Christians, whether we admit it or not, do not want to be ostracized or persecuted. And so we can often seek to blend in with the culture. In contrast to that, we can often retreat from the culture and gather with and speak to only those who live and believe as we do. Long before the science of sociology as we know it today was ever dreamed of, Jesus described for us how we are to live and make a lasting difference as Christians within the larger culture. We are to be salt and light, an influence for good in the lives of those around us (Matthew 5:13-16). Simply stated, to be salt in the world is to push back against the sin and decay of this broken world by being used as an instrument of God's grace to be a preserving influence as well as being a flavor enhancer.

To be light in the world is to seek to live and speak in such a way that we push back against the darkness of sin with the light of God's truth given in scripture. No institution in the world but the church is given the task of making a lasting difference in the culture around us by bringing the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ to those who do not know him. God is at work

in us and through us for good. Dr. Bryan Chapell, pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church PCA in Peoria, Illinois has written, “Jesus is changing the world for the good of the church by means of the church...No other agency on earth has this promise. God gives no other institution the promise or the power that it will be salt and light in the world. The world will ultimately and eternally yield to the influence of the church, because it is the body of him who is head over all and, thus [the church] contains and exerts his power on behalf of his own glory.”

How does this take place practically in our lives? We are all made in the image of God. We need to look for things that are good in all people even as we seek to show them their need for Jesus Christ to save them from their sin. To be sure, this is not a project to start and then seek to find a completion date. This is a lifestyle for all Christians. You and I must seek to be an influence for good in our culture. This is our responsibility and we cannot pass it on to someone else, particularly the government. In God’s plan the government has an important function in our society (Romans 13:1-7) but it is only Christians that God uses as instruments of his grace for true and lasting change of lives from the inside out.

In the coming days and weeks as we have opportunity to speak to others about the tragic events that happened in Ferguson, Missouri, may God help us to be salt and light; to be part of the gospel solution, rather than adding more unnecessary tension to the already existing problems.

Reverend Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Ill.

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