

Did the Apostles Ever Attempt to Change the Culture?

By David DeWitt

- As with Jesus, the New Testament gives us no example of the apostles involved in or suggesting any church be involved in changing the world's cultures. As Paul was awaiting execution in Rome, he told his disciple Timothy, *the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also* (1 Timothy 2:2). **Timothy's ministry was to be about discipling faithful men, not cultural change.**
- Then Paul compared ministry to suffering the hardship of a soldier and added, *no soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier* (2 Timothy 2:2-4). The ministry pattern that Paul left for Timothy to model was speaking out boldly for the resurrection of Christ: in synagogues where there was one, at a place of prayer beside the river in Philippi, at a place designated for public addresses in Athens, publicly and from house-to-house in Ephesus, and from his own rented quarters in Rome. **He did not entangle himself in the social, cultural, or political affairs of everyday life.** For example, in Thessalonica, Paul ... *went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ"* (Acts 17:2-3).
- In Athens, Paul spoke of the true God, saying, *He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead* (Acts 17:31). In Rome, Paul was ... *trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening* (Acts 28:23). The Apostle Peter's message was *to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead* (1 Peter 1:3). The Apostle John's message was ... *if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin* (1 John 1:7). **At no time did the Apostles Peter, Paul, or John say anything about a cultural mandate, redeeming the culture, restoring creation, fixing the planet.**
- The apostles were indeed concerned and involved in helping other believers who were poor. Paul was sensitive to needy Christian widows in Ephesus (1 Timothy 5:3-16), but he made no attempt to make the general Ephesians culture more sensitive to widows. He organized a gift to the church in Jerusalem because of a famine (Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:3; 2 Corinthians 9:5; 1 Timothy 5:3-16). **But he made no attempt to impact, improve, or eradicate poverty in the city of Jerusalem.**
- The apostles were sensitive to the poor people they encountered as they presented the gospel. For example, when Peter and John encountered a lame man begging for money at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, Peter said, *I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!* (Acts 3:6). When the leaders in Jerusalem sent Paul and Barnabas out to do evangelism among the Gentiles, Paul reported, *they only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do* (Galatians 2:10).
- The Lord's half-brother James wrote, *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress* (James 1:27). **Notice, James is talking about visiting orphans and widows, not changing the culture to help them.** Of course, *to visit* includes the idea of personal financial care, but many orphans and widows would rather have a visit than a gift. And James addressed this to *my brethren* eight times (James 1:2; 2:1; 2:14; 3:1; 3:10; 3:12; 5:12; 5:19). James never suggested any of his Christian brethren get involved in a cultural mandate, social justice transformation, restoring creation, fixing the planet, or initiating programs "to impact the culture in ways consistent with Christian doctrine and piety."