

 **Conference**
2026

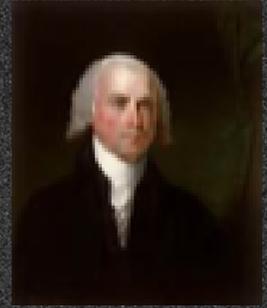
RESPONDING TO POLITICAL EVENTS

Allen Tennison & Renea Brathwaite

John 18:33-38

33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” 34 “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” 35 “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?” 36 Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” 37 “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” 38 “What is truth?” retorted Pilate.

Pastoring in Polarized Times



“The latent causes of faction are thus sown in the nature of man; and we see them every where brought into different degrees of activity, according to the different circumstances of civil society. A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points, as well of speculation as of practice; an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power; or to persons of other descriptions whose fortunes have been interesting to the human passions, have inturn divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other, than to co-operate for their common good. So strong is this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities, that where no substantial occasion presents itself, the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions, and excite their most violent conflicts. . . . It is in vain to say, that enlightened statesmen will be able to adjust these clashing interests, and render them all subservient to the public good. Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm;”

– James Madison, *The Federalist* #10, 1787

Pastoring in Polarized Times

Presence Of Crisis

Rise of Conflict

Spread of Confusion

Need for Clarity

Pastoring in Polarized Times

Cultural Insecurity

Economic instability
Rapid cultural change
Loss of trust and unity

Information Flow

Social Media
News Media
Cancel Culture

Ideology Politics

Appeals to the Wing
Zero-Sum Game

Identity Formation

Identity Politics
Packaged Ethics

Human Inclination

Justice Versus
Self-Justification

Cultural Insecurity

“man’s nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols.”
“in the absence of religion, politics becomes religion.”

Pastoring in Polarized Times

Under polarization:

- moral issues are bundled together so support of one means support all
- Facts are spun to support one side
- Leaders rewarded for “owning” the other side rather than truth-telling

Pastoring in Polarized Times

In a polarized culture, our witness will be set apart by truth-telling.

- People long for truth, not just security
- When the local church becomes known for always telling the truth, people will long for the local church.

Responding to Culture

Approach to Culture	Culture Posture	Theological Logic
Accommodationist	Align with culture	Christ fulfills culture's highest ideals; strong continuity
Assimilationist	Blend into culture	Christian faith interpreted through prevailing culture
Rejectionist	Resist and withdraw	Sharp antithesis between church and world; strong discontinuity
Isolationist	Limit engagement	Culture viewed as spiritually dangerous; tension maintained
Affirmationist	Affirm but subordinate	Nature-grace synthesis; culture good but perfected by grace
Redemptive	Engage and reform	God's grace can redeem fallen culture.

Responding to Cultural Events

When should we not respond?

- When a response is driven by comparison with other leaders rather than concern for the body
- When a response feeds outrage, not hope
- When a response only protects political tribes

Responding to Cultural Events

When should we not respond?

- When the response can only offer too simplistic an answer
- When the response would reflect hypocrisy rather than morality or good theology
- When the response favors division over discipleship

Responding to Cultural Events

When should we respond?

- When the direction of discipleship is at stake:
- We disciple people into the meaning of the gospel
- We disciple people towards Christlikeness
- We disciple people for unity and ministry
- We disciple people to act like church before the world

Responding to Cultural Events

When should we respond?

- To prevent perversion of Christian community:
 - Idolatry (perverting how we worship)
 - Immorality (perverting how we use our bodies)
 - Injustice (perverting how we treat our neighbors)
 - Inhumanity (perverting how we live as God's image)

Responding to Cultural Events

How should we respond in disagreement?

- With humility in understanding of our own limitations
- With love for everyone to whom we are addressing
- With patience for those who might disagree
- With peace as the goal for our discussion

Responding to Cultural Events

How should we respond for modeling?

- With a compassion towards all impacted
- With a conviction of Christian morality
- With a concern for our public witness
- With a clarity about the gospel

Responding to Cultural Events

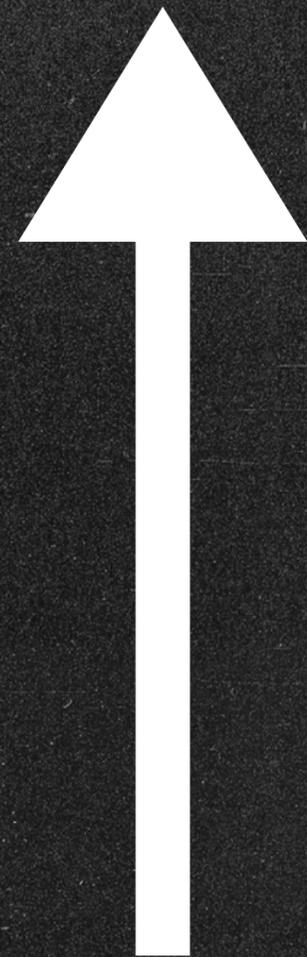
Understanding, explanation, application of the Gospel

Theology answers:

- What? (What do we believe?) Ex. Jesus died for our sins
- Why? (Why do we believe it?) Ex. Jesus rose from the dead
- How? (How does it work?) Ex. Jesus took on our punishment
- So what? (Why does it matter?) Ex. We are dead in our sins
- Now what? (What should I do now?) Ex. Repent and believe

Responding to Cultural Events

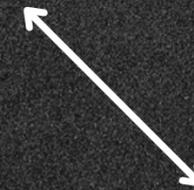
Theology Pyramid:



Father



God



Jesus



Holy Spirit

Salvation Last Things Humanity Church

Religions Culture Economy Politics Family Tech

LGBTQ

BLM

CRT

IVF

ICE

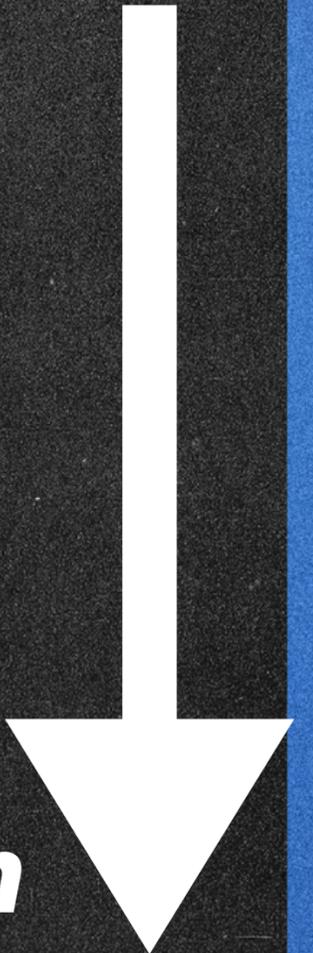
CIA

CNN

NFL

USA

XYZ



Responding to Cultural Events

Paul shows how to respond to cultural questions:

- Should we insist on the circumcision of all believers?

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. 2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4 You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 5 For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. 7 You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? 8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 9 "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." 10 I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. 11 Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. 12 As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves! 13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." - Galatians 5:1-14

Responding to Cultural Events

Paul shows how to respond to cultural questions:

- Can we eat food sacrificed to idols?

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. 2 Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. 3 But whoever loves God is known by God. 4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.” 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. 7 But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. 8 But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. 9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? 11 So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12 When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall. - 1 Corinthians 8

Responding to Cultural Events

Paul shows how to respond to cultural questions:

- How do we respond to human authorities?

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. 13 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. 4 For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. 8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. – Romans 12:21-13:10