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# John the Baptist on How to Change Culture



**W**hat does the Bible say is the way to go about changing culture? Since the founding of our nation, Christians have tried to change our country’s direction and our culture to better reflect God’s precepts. That effort continues today as politically based groups meet regularly to plot, strategize, and implement changes to our culture.

Note Luke chapter 3 in consideration of the opening question. Therein revealed is how John the Baptist went about changing culture—and what an insight he provides for us today! John the Baptist reveals the preeminent means to which every believer should be committed to change culture. Luke 3 points to the most excellent pursuit for both you and me.

Read on, my friend.



Ralph Drollinger

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

- Former Cabinet Members / White House Senior Staff: Wednesdays 7am, Zoom.
- Senate Members: Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served.
- House Members: Thursdays 8am, AG Hearing Room, Longworth 1302, hot breakfast served.

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*The views expressed in each Bible study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study Sponsor.*



## Capitol Ministries Prepares for Growth

Capitol Ministries Global Directors met with Ralph Drollinger recently to hammer out processes, procedures, and methodologies to fortify the internal infrastructure and keep the ministry on the right path after we were blessed with significant growth.



“When ministries grow quickly, they can suffer logistic problems, weakening of doctrinal integrity, and a deterioration in specificity of purpose if robust support systems are not in place,” said Drollinger, President and Founder of Capitol Ministries. “We are developing a strong infrastructure that is necessary for CapMin to remain on a consistent, true, and right path after we were blessed with extraordinary growth over the past few years—growth that is proving to be ongoing. As we plan out our four Recruitment and Training Conferences for

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### I. INTRODUCTION: THE CORRECT WAY TO CHANGE CULTURE

Heated debate among Evangelical pastors and church leaders has erupted over the past 40 years as to how the believer should best engage in societal change. While both sides of the debate represent noble motives and seek the same objective, how to best achieve it, unfortunately, remains controversial. Let me suggest that this study’s passage in Luke makes a strong and simple case for the following:

**The believer’s primary emphasis on heart change will assuredly and eventually result in culture change.**

Luke chapter 3 is a powerful and insightful passage regarding the guaranteed social benefits that inure from the evangelism efforts of believers. The following excerpts from that somewhat lengthy passage will enable you to quickly see my point. (Contextually, the “he” refers to John the Baptist.)

*And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins* (v. 3).

*“Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance...”* (v. 8).

*And the crowds were questioning him, saying, “Then what shall we do?” And he would answer and say to them, “The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.” And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.” Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, “And what about us, what*

*shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages”* (vv. 10–14).<sup>1</sup>

I have purposefully selected certain verses in this passage to simply read in a way that makes the social implications of John’s evangelism immediately apparent.

John the Baptist was an evangelist preaching repentance, and that repentance is a necessary component to true conversion—in contrast to what is today termed as “easy believism.” Otherwise, when you think about it, why do you need to be saved in the first place if in your heart there is no acknowledgment of being lost? Why are you seeking Christ and His forgiveness if in your heart you sense no need? True conversion, true cultural change, only stems from a gospel message that is heavily laden with the necessity of personal repentance from sin. Certainly, John the Baptist models that exigency in these verses. John preached *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*.

Notice what follows in terms of cultural change. In Luke 3 the Word of God says that personal generosity, integrity, respect for others’ property and person, as well as personal contentment, are *the fruits in keeping with repentance*. All stem from the conversion of the soul by the gospel of Jesus Christ! It follows that:

**The reason so many capitalistic cultures do not function properly is related to the lack of repentance and conversion in the populace. Capitalism should never be understood to be the sole determinant to a successful culture.**



In Luke 3, identified are three different sectors of Palestinian culture that were present when John the Baptist preached: the *crowds*, the *tax collectors*, and the *soldiers*. Although culturally dissimilar, all were profoundly affected by John's message in ways similar. Regardless of socio-economic background, each *repented* of his sins and was genuinely transformed (cf. Romans 12:2).

Why the same result from a culturally divergent audience? Stemming from their conversions, all therein and subsequently possessed an internal, Holy-Spirit-driven unction (cf. Romans 8:9) characterized by and resulting in the same response! Notice from the passage the threefold mention in verse 12: "*What shall we do?*" Said another way:

The Holy Spirit always indwells the heart of the genuinely converted. And, as indicated by this passage, He always convicts the converted to become a better citizen!

Don't miss this simple, profound point as taught in and by the Word of God! This paradigm should hugely inform those who are passionate about changing culture!

Each of the three assemblages is instructed by John to bear character qualities that will most certainly benefit society! Here, then, is the best way to effect societal change in the long run. (To disagree with this certainty is to disagree with the simple, clear meaning of the passage.)

Has not American Evangelicalism in its attempt to change the country largely disregarded the power of evangelism?

**Would you agree with me  
that it is time for believers  
to make evangelism a  
priority in the capital?**

Can America really become "great again" over the long run without an emphasis on heart transformation via the gospel of Jesus Christ? Is not now the time to return to the simple biblical formula as evidenced in Luke 3 for effecting societal change?<sup>2</sup>

What follows to form a more deep-seated conviction concerning the above, simple, biblical formula for changing culture are five wrong ways to undertake this mission—as indexed chronologically throughout American history. Stay with me now and read on; this study will be worth your time.

## II. WRONG WAY NUMBER 1: POSTMILLENNIALISM

The first wrong way to approach the matter of changing culture is via an eschatological motivation and outlook—especially one that is not rooted in Scripture. What exactly do I mean?

Postmillennialism was the prevailing eschatological point of view of the American church from the Puritan era through the Civil War. Eschatology is what the Bible supposedly teaches about the future. Postmillennialism is the understanding of the future in this way: Christ will return at the end of the millennial period—at which time believers will have Christianized the world and prepared the way for Him. As such, Postmillennialism helps to explain the reason and motivation as to why Christians were involved in society during the earliest period of American church history. Postmillennialism was promoted through this period of the Great Awakening by such preachers as the great Jonathan Edwards.

**In this context, the church  
was guided and motivated**

♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

### Luke 3:3

*And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*



The best way the Church should relate to the State is via evangelism! The State needs it; the institution of the Church has it, and the culture changes for the better because of it!





Continued from page 2

this year, we all need to be on the same page as to who we recruit.”

The Global directors traveled from several continents for the meetings include Oscar Zamora, Latin America; Jon Cassel, Africa; Slavik Rimski, Europe; Valeriu Ghiletschi, Europe; Brian Solomon, North America; Brian Hanson, International Global Director; Dan DeShong, Local Government Ministries. A vital element to the ministry’s mission is making sure that new recruits—ministry leader candidates—are the caliber and quality of CapMin’s biblically reliant Bible-teaching evangelists who are already ministering to political leaders of the world. To that end, Drollinger stressed the importance of all recruits agreeing to our Evangelical doctrinal statement. In addition, he distributed to the men a newly published 76-page *Ministry Leader Training Manual* that is loaded with instruction, teaching, and practical applications. The book will augment the required ministry leader training that must be completed before men may begin a CapMin ministry.

The training manual will be beneficial not only in terms of recruiting new ministry leaders, but for use by existing leaders who are serving at all levels of ministry, from local governments to state capitols to foreign parliaments. Ministry leader training is vital so that candidates understand CapMin’s theology and methodology and, most

### by a misguided “prophetic” determinism to work for societal change to usher in the return of Christ.

In their way of thinking, involvement in politics and changing culture was essential and motivated by a desire to usher in the kingdom of God, which was equated with Christ’s physical return. Christ will only return at a point in time when believers have prepared the way by Christianizing all the nations of the world. In Postmillennial thought, Christianizing the world was and is “the believer’s side of the bargain” that must be achieved to enact Christ’s Second Coming. To illustrate the tangential fervor of this eschatological understanding in early America, church historian Marsden summarizes what was widely believed at that time:

America has a special place in God’s plans and will be the center for the great spiritual and moral reform that will lead to the golden age or “millennium” of Christian civilization. Moral reform accordingly is crucial for hastening this spiritual millennium.<sup>3</sup>

The Puritans, as well as present-day Postmillennialists (a now very small minority of Evangelicals), believe that Christ’s kingdom will grow out of the spiritual and moral progress gained by and through the believer’s efforts at *reforming* politics and culture in the present age. But *reforming* is not necessarily equated with soul winning, i.e., the simple aforesaid formula of Luke chapter 3 evangelism. Social progress in general in the Postmillennial-driven Puritan period was evidence of the advance of the kingdom of God.

Arthur Cushman McGiffert, a leading Postmillennialist who stated, “The king-

dom of God is not a kingdom lying in another world beyond the skies but established here and now,”<sup>4</sup> illustrates further the summation of this belief. Accordingly, missionary progress was measured during the Puritan period not only in terms of evangelistic crusades, revival, and church planting, but in terms of cultural advancement. Cultural successes pertaining to the abolishment of slavery and technological achievement were just as much measurements of the Christianization of America as anything else.

The point to all this is that Postmillennialism was the singular prevailing theological impetus that motivated and justified the church to emphasize being directly involved in the politics and culture of the country. Therefore, a person’s attempt to ascertain the repeatable effectiveness for today of the Evangelical church’s involvement in the political/cultural arena, as was the case during the Puritan period, rises or falls on whether Postmillennial eschatology is biblically demonstrable and verifiable today.

In fact, Postmillennialism is not exegetically popular today; it has been roundly discounted by leading conservative Evangelical theologians. No Scripture supports the idea that Christ’s Second Coming is predicated on the church’s Christianizing culture beforehand. Today, the dominant eschatology in the American church is Premillennialism. This predominant eschatological camp believes that Christ’s Second Coming will occur at the start of the millennial period to save the world from its own tragedy. In fact, most all of today’s leading national Evangelical expository preachers (whom you hear on Christian radio) are Premillennialists. Accordingly:

**Postmillennialism is in no position to be the tour de**

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**force that it once was so as to be a leading impetus for cultural change today.**

Postmillennialism, if it were true to Scripture, would be a great pragmatic motivation to engage believers in culture, but this interpretation is woefully lacking in terms of biblical underpinnings.

Said another way, if prophetic determinism (Postmillennial thought to usher in God's kingdom by transforming culture) is the total motivation and justification for manifesting social actions, then social involvement by the church pivots on its ability to biblically substantiate Postmillennial belief.<sup>5</sup> The American church had largely rejected Postmillennial eschatology by the conclusion of WWII. So, if the premise of Postmillennialism is built on faulty eschatological exposition, then it stands to reason that what motivated Puritan cultural involvement back then is unsustainable and incapable of doing the same for today. Therefore, it stands to reason that nurturing and promoting Postmillennialism is a wrong way to attempt changing culture today.

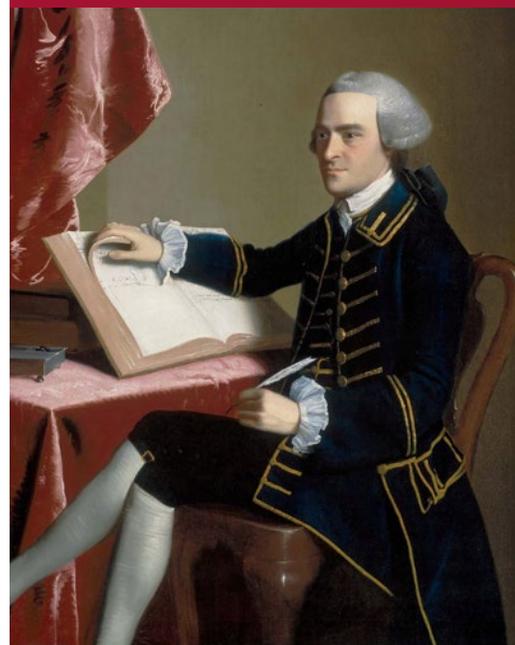
Remember, these five wrong ways to proffer cultural change are listed in the order they appear in American church history. So, to summarize this first epoch of American church history as it pertains to the preeminence of saving faith to societal change (the sole progenitor of cultural change in Luke chapter 3), the impetus, formula, and motivation that served to engage the early American church in a mission to change society was Postmillennial eschatology. Such was more so than straight-up evangelism. Summarily, the Puritan way to change culture was based on an exegetically faulty eschatology.

### III. WRONG WAY NUMBER 2: THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM

The theologically distinctive period in American church history that immediately followed Puritanism was the rise of Modernism, or better termed, Theological Liberalism, aka the Social Gospel. This changing of the American theological landscape was a dominant (but not entire) metamorphosis that occurred over a period from approximately 1865 to 1915. The primacy of Postmillennial-driven Puritanism segued into a primacy of liberal Protestantism. Ushered in was what is commonly referred to as the Social Gospel form of "Christianity." During this period in American church history, there can be no doubt as to the accelerating involvement of the American "church" into the political/social arena, as depicted by the very name: the *Social Gospel*. However, the pertinent question is this: was the Social Gospel a *true-to-the-Bible*-based attempt to change culture?

J. Gresham Machen resoundingly stated, "No, it [the Social Gospel] is not biblical Christianity whatsoever!" In his book *Christianity and [Theological] Liberalism* published in 1923, Machen became the chief opponent spokesman against what had by then become a thoroughly entrenched liberal Protestantism. Machen (from whose primer I learned the Greek language) had been a New Testament professor at Princeton Theological Seminary prior to the liberal Presbyterians' wresting control of the institution. Machen and his theologically conservative cohorts then left the school to found Westminster Seminary. Importantly and accurately, he insisted that liberal Protestantism was "another religion, since it proposed an entirely

*John Hancock*



*He called on the State of Massachusetts to pray ...*

**"... that with true contrition of heart we may confess our sins, resolve to forsake them, and implore the Divine forgiveness, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, our Savior .... And finally to overrule all the commotions in the world to the spreading the true religion of our Lord Jesus Christ in its purity and power among all the people of the earth."**

— John Hancock, signer of the Declaration of Independence, President of Congress, American Revolutionary War general, Governor of Massachusetts.

*John Hancock, Proclamation for Day of Public Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer, March 4, 1793.*



*Continued from page 4*

important, embrace the biblical Top-Down Missions Strategy that is at the heart of CapMin’s mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ in the political arena throughout the world. This Top-Down Missions Strategy, found in many books of the Bible, teaches that political leaders are to be reached first with God’s Word. The Greek word often used in these passages in the New Testament is *protos* which means “first in priority.”

Four international training conferences are scheduled in strategic places around the world where CapMin has its sights on expanding the ministry. With the unease felt across the globe caused by Russia’s invasion of sovereign Ukraine, now is the time for CapMin to expand ministries to teach the Bible to the world’s leaders.

“What has often been said, ‘There are no atheists in foxholes’ is true,” Drollinger said. “People seek God under times of turmoil.” That is especially true of the leaders of nations who feel vulnerable. For many years as we’ve labored to build CapMin, I have often thought that when world disruption occurs, spiritually rocky soil will become fertile ground that is ready for the seed of the Word of God. And so at this time, our efforts to establish ministries to teach God’s Word to political leaders must intensify. There is an increasingly wide open door before us like never before; we

*Continued on page 8*

new view of Jesus and a scheme of salvation other than Christianity had ever taught before.”<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, Modernist Christianity, if Machen was correct, possessed no scriptural basis for its desired political/social outcomes because the Social Gospel was not a legitimate depiction of Christianity to begin with! Its influence and attempt to change culture were based on a faulty hermeneutic and exegetical premise.

### **Liberal Protestantism had rejected and dumped Christianity’s irreducible minimums and created its own.**

The core heresy of Liberal Protestantism continues to be this: Jesus is not our Savior; He is not salvific per se. He is merely a humble, humanitarian role model worthy of personal exemplification—as if that is all that Jesus is about! Herein is a satanic stripping away, a denuding of the power of the cross of Christ. Herein is a totally other religion who deceptively—and to the confusion of many—wears the same name of its authentic father.

Modernism represented a not-so-subtle convergence of four concussive confluences on Puritan Christianity. Briefly, the movement was composed of Naturalism or Darwinism, which raised doubt as to the supernatural and scientific accuracy of Scripture. Secondly, Modernism contained within it the presupposition of human rationalism. That is to say that man’s reasoning was deemed superior, a higher authority, than God’s revelation in Scripture. Therefore, any Scripture that could not be understood through man’s (finite and, I should add, fallen) reasoning abilities was viewed with suspicion. Thirdly, liberal Historical Criticism (the science of codifying the ancient manuscript evidence in the

manufacture of the Bible) was imported from the Tubingen School in Germany. This criticism had many forms with the intellectual intent of casting doubt, among other things, on the accuracy of the Synoptic Gospels. It asked the question, could the reader of the Bible trust what Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote? Or was the supposedly real, historically accurate Jesus different from the “Christian” Jesus whom the gospel writers had portrayed and embellished? In this sense, both Naturalism and Historical Criticism enshrined the Scriptures with theoretical plausible doubt. Add to that the fourth confluence of the encroaching Social Gospel as invented by Kant, Schleiermacher and Beecher, and summarily, Puritan Christianity had been gutted, degenerating into nothing more than a moral code for people to live by. “Christianity,” then, was reduced to offering human advice rather than teaching about God’s commanded precepts. Scriptural preeminence and authority had been gutted. Liberal Protestantism was—and remains—a far cry from historic biblical Christianity. Therefore, per the premise of this study:

### **With such faulty presuppositions, how could theological liberalism possibly change culture for the better?**

(As an aside, the preceding commentary explains why so many in the capital, who say they are “Christians” but are embedded in Theological Liberalism, reason differently on policy issues. As Machen quipped, they may wear the name “Christian” on their shirtsleeve, but they are part of another religion!)

Conservative Christian leadership of that time either possessed few apologists of learning, or they made little of the



threat until it was too late. They were reluctant to justifiably **BE angry** (Ephesians 4:26) in the sense of righteous indignation in an aggressive rejection of encroaching false doctrine. This attitude is descriptive of the great evangelist D. L. Moody, who was opposed to controversy itself. Whereas the New Testament writer Jude preempted his soteriological emphasis in order to earnestly defend the faith from apostasy (cf. Jude 3), Moody, who possessed the platform and the influence to do so in the American church as a leading nationally recognized evangelist, seemingly would have no part in such activities. He was known as a theological pragmatist and “often tested doctrines relative to their suitability for evangelism.”<sup>7</sup> He always sought peace and avoided controversy, seeking a religion of the heart, versus a religion of the mind. He often dialogued with theological liberals, giving them grace with the hope that they would eventually come around and return to traditional biblical views. But such was not the case, and in part as a result, Modernism became well-rooted, the primary theology and cultural force during this period in American church history.

**When all was said and done, the Social Gospel had eclipsed the Puritan pulpit as the primary religious tour de force in American culture.**

The “church” was now—for certain—engaged in societal change but was far from being doctrinally congruent with the perspicuous teachings of the New Testament.

It therefore follows that the Modernists’ justification for social action by using Scripture is illegitimate because they truncate the basic doctrines of biblical

Christianity in order to achieve their Social Gospel ends. The historic doctrines of the faith were reworked and modified into a supposed foundation for social aims. Make no mistake; Scripture does not support this revision. Therefore, Scripture does not validate the political/social direction of Modernism because, to begin with, the Social Gospel is not consistent with, but rather antithetical to biblical Christianity. Modernism was founded upon a self-styled, eisegetical epistemology which seeks to morph Scripture in order to use it to support preconceived liberal social views versus the objective use of Scripture, which is to extract and apply from it its timeless, repetitive, perspicuous precepts. Accordingly:

**This period of church history does not have a legitimate, extracted-from-Scripture, theological treatise to biblically justify its social expression.**

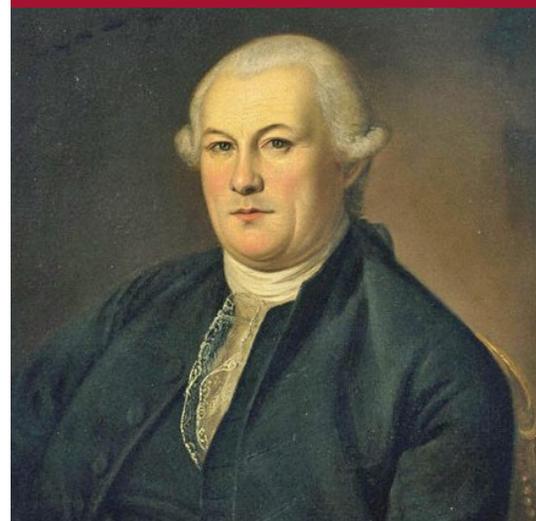
Therefore, Christian involvement in the political arena through this epoch of American church history lacks a correct biblical and theological underpinning. Luke chapter 3 evangelism was far from its agenda because Theological Liberalism was about social moralism, not personal evangelism, which remains true today.

What about the coming Fundamentalist period? Would it be characterized by the primacy of saving faith to create societal change?

#### **IV. WRONG WAY NUMBER 3: FUNDAMENTALIST REACTIONISM**

One of the recurring themes in Joel Carpenter’s super-informative book, *Revive*

*Elias Boudinot*



**“Let us enter on this important business under the idea that we are Christians on whom the eyes of the world are now turned... [L]et us earnestly call and beseech Him, for Christ’s sake, to preside in our councils.... We can only depend on the all powerful influence of the Spirit of God, Whose Divine aid and assistance it becomes us as a Christian people most devoutly to implore. Therefore I move that some minister of the Gospel be requested to attend this Congress every morning ... in order to open the meeting with prayer.”**

— Elias Boudinot, President of Congress, signed the Peace Treaty to end the American Revolution, first attorney admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court Bar, framer of the Bill of Rights, Director of the U.S. Mint.

Elias Boudinot, *The Life, Public Services, Addresses, and Letters of Elias Boudinot*, J. J. Boudinot, ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1896), Vol. I, 19, 21, speech in the First Provincial Congress of New Jersey.



*Continued from page 6*

need a greater sense of urgency that fuels both prayer and personal industriousness. This is the moment when we need to accelerate founding and growing ministries in the capitals throughout the world, especially in Eastern and Western Europe. I ask our prayer partners and supporters to please pray for the success of these conferences so more leaders of more nations will come to know Him.”

*Us Again*, is the idea that the Fundamentalist movement’s social involvement (that involvement which is apart from evangelism) was motivated out of reactionary pride: the strong, visceral unction to take back the center stage from the Modernists, who had stolen it away from the Puritans. States Carpenter,

Those who founded the fundamentalist movement witnessed this shift in cultural leadership and began to notice that their own status and influence was waning.<sup>8</sup>

Earlier in his book Carpenter states,

[They saw] their status as community leaders and the influence of their evangelical values decrease sharply while a new elite of university-trained secular professors and [theological] liberal clergy gained power and prestige.... Fundamentalists had been deeply shamed in the battles of the 1920s, but they could not give up on the vision of a Christian America.<sup>9</sup>

The human desire to get back all that had been lost to the theological liberals (seminaries, colleges, denominations, churches, mission agencies, publishing companies, and their like) was a compelling motive that seemed to eclipse the need for a clearly reasoned theology relative as to how to go about accomplishing that aspiration. This same compelling desire seemed to eclipse the need to stop and question the validity of the earlier Puritan objective to “Christianize America” (as was motivated by a Postmillennial eschatology) in the first place. Furthermore, an underlying assumption by the Fundamentalists existed that what had been lost was that which God had intended for believers to recover and always possess. Again,

biblically speaking how to achieve the repossession of these institutions is missing from the literature of the time. Accordingly, Fundamentalists sought many means to “take back America from the [theological] liberals” but no biblically reasoned document by any leader during the period exists to show how such a goal could be achieved. Fundamentalists were motivated and driven, if not captivated, by an overwhelming reactionary pragmatism to recover their huge losses.

One of the chief intellectual spokespersons for Fundamentalism (although he did not identify himself as a Fundamentalist) was, as previously mentioned, J. Gresham Machen. Importantly, and worth repeating, Machen had argued *against* theological liberals’ political/social involvement that was intended to change culture.<sup>10</sup> Machen was sensitive to the church’s becoming focused on means other than evangelism and discipleship to instead lapse into a moralizing campaign void of a biblical justification. He reasoned why try to do what the Theological liberals had done, i.e., become involved in politics to manifest their religious beliefs? Machen alludes to this involvement when he says the following:

The Christian Missionary[’s]... chief business, he believes, is the saving of souls, and souls are saved not by [teaching] the mere ethical principles of Jesus but by His redemptive work...human goodness [the emphasis of Theological Liberalism] will avail nothing for lost souls; ye must be born again.”<sup>11</sup>

Theological liberals had united with the institution of government to achieve their understanding of Jesus’ gospel:



that it was not a personal conversion (a reformed and Puritan understanding of what Scripture teaches) but rather a Social Gospel. Thus:

**The Fundamentalists' reaction to the aberrant understanding of the gospel as being social was this: they withdrew from all forms of government involvement—lest a Fundamentalists be perceived to be a modernist!**

The Fundamentalist who understood and believed in the power of change via personal conversion to Christ, those who possessed the unadulterated message of salvation in their knee-jerk reaction to Modernism, abandoned the mission field of the state! This is a tragic wrong reaction relative to the future course of the nation.

Accordingly, even though Fundamentalists possessed a proper understanding of the gospel in the sense of Luke chapter 3—that it was salvific and could internally change a person into being a good citizen—they elected to forsake the mission field of civil government in reaction to that being the emphasis of the Modernists! They threw out the baby (the necessity of taking the real gospel to the institution of government) because they perceived the bathwater (the theological liberals had made this their primary point of emphasis and involvement to achieve their understanding of Scripture) to be dirty. Again, how tragic!

In our search for a historic application of the simple truth of Luke chapter 3—that saving faith is the best progenitor of societal advance/cultural change—let us recap these first three dominant periods of American church history:

The Puritans engaged culture motivated by Postmillennialism more so than personal evangelism.

The Modernists engaged culture motivated by a social understanding of Jesus' mission, not personal evangelism.

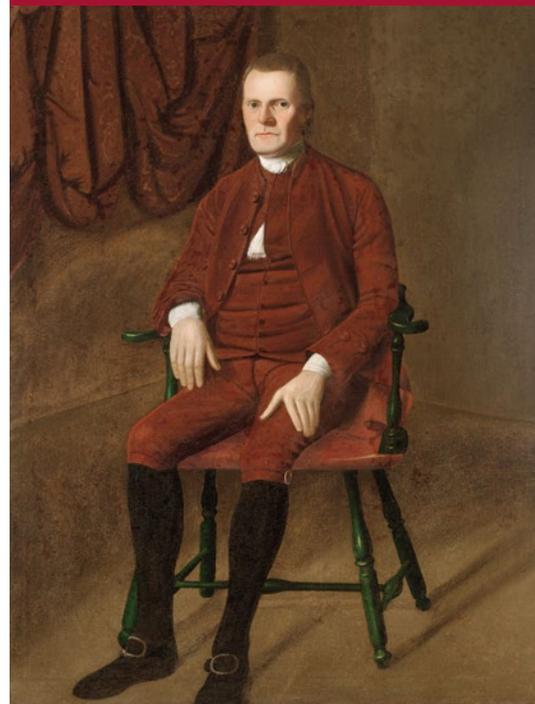
The Fundamentalists did not engage culture even though they believed wholeheartedly in personal evangelism.

Parenthetically, in a larger sense, the mission of Capitol Ministries is to reverse this third wrong way of influencing culture by bringing a Premillennial eschatology, coupled with a salvific Jesus, back into the political arena. Why? Because Luke 3 reveals that is the best way to change culture for the better.

#### V. WRONG WAY NUMBER 4: NEO-EVANGELICALISM

During the late 1940s, Harold Ockenga and Carl Henry, among others, birthed Neo-evangelicalism with the intent of sanding off the seemingly rough edges of an increasingly sectarian militant Fundamentalism. By this time Fundamentalism had been bloodied in its war with liberal Protestantism, and its resulting public image was one of a combatant which, in simple terms, had marginalized its influence in the eyes of broad society. Accordingly, "Neo" evangelical is a new titling to a movement and desire to, among other things, increase Evangelical influence in society. Motivated by the belief that Fundamentalism had

*Roger Sherman*



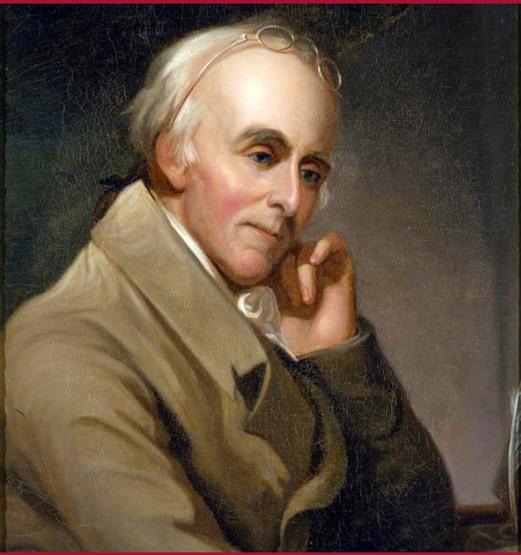
**“God commands all men everywhere to repent. He also commands them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and has assured us that all who do repent and believe shall be saved ... [G]od ... has absolutely promised to bestow them on all these who are willing to accept them on the terms of the Gospel—that is, in a way of free grace through the atonement. ‘Ask and ye shall receive [John 16:24]. Whosoever will, let him come and take of the waters of life freely [Revelation 22:17]. Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out’ [John 6:37].”**

— Roger Sherman, signer of the Declaration of Independence, signer of the Constitution, “Master Builder of the Constitution,” judge, framer of the Bill of Rights, U.S. senator.

Correspondence Between Roger Sherman and Samuel Hopkins (Worcester, MA: Charles Hamilton, 1889), 9, from Roger Sherman to Samuel Hopkins, June 28, 1790.



Benjamin Rush



“The Gospel of Jesus Christ prescribes the wisest rules for just conduct in every situation of life. Happy they who are enabled to obey them in all situations! ... My only hope of salvation is in the infinite transcendent love of God manifested to the world by the death of His Son upon the Cross. Nothing but His blood will wash away my sins [Acts 22:16]. I rely exclusively upon it. Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly! [Revelation 22:20].”

— Benjamin Rush, signer of the Declaration of Independence, Surgeon General of the Continental Army, ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, “Father of American Medicine,” Treasurer of the U.S. Mint, “Father of Public Schools Under the Constitution.”

Benjamin Rush, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush*, George W. Corner, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 165–166.

## John the Baptist on How to Change Culture

isolated itself from being able to play a major role in the influence of American culture, the purveyors of Neo-evangelicalism were attempting a Christian metamorphosis, a makeover and rein-troduction of biblical Christianity. This “new chapter” idea can be illustrated in several ways.

First is the landmark article that appeared in *Christian Life* magazine in March of 1956, titled “*Is Evangelical Theology Changing?*”<sup>12</sup> Contributors to the article were numerous and noted Christian leaders. Among the eight listed major changes from Fundamentalism to Neo-evangelicalism was the need to have “A more definite recognition of social responsibility.” The article states in this regard:

“Nevertheless—unlike Fundamentalism—Evangelicalism realizes the church has a prophetic mission to society. There are times when the church must thunder, *‘Thus saith the Lord!’*”<sup>13</sup>

The article goes on to say in greater specificity, “We must...make Evangelicalism more relevant to the political and sociological realities of our time.”<sup>14</sup>

But the article failed to build a biblical basis for the previous conclusive statement, i.e., becoming more socially involved. This is especially important, considering the Neo-evangelical leaders’ underemphasis regarding the pre-eminence of evangelism as the primary means of the institution of the church’s impacting culture.

Carl Henry, the leading voice in the Neo-evangelical movement, is known for his leading work in this regard, titled *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. This book represents

the Magna Carta of the emerging prominence of the Neo-evangelical position as the pendulum now swung away from historic militant Fundamentalism in American church history.

From a sense of logic and reasoning, Henry’s postulations seem quite persuasive. However, he fails to provide any sort of biblical basis for his thesis regarding the necessity of a social emphasis by the institution of the church<sup>15</sup> apart from the obvious relationship that we have seen in Luke chapter 3—that social/cultural change primarily emanates from evangelistic endeavor.<sup>16</sup>

**As a matter of fact, the simple biblical formula of Luke chapter 3 is nowhere to be found in Henry’s book!**

How unfortunate because once again in the major epochs of American church history, the institution of the church is about to miss the obvious way in which it should primarily—and, in terms of overall effectiveness—is best suited to relate to and best effect the state.

When Henry makes the charge that “Modern Fundamentalism does not explicitly sketch the social implications of its message for the non-Christian world,” has he not failed to consider Luke 3?

Void of a Luke 3 informative understanding of the primary purpose of the institution of the church as it relates to the state, Neo-evangelicalism is about to wander once again down the same path of Theological Liberalism! The unique trump card of the institution of the church is evangelism, not moralism!

**The church best influences the state in ways that on it can: evangelizing the lost.**



Many more voices of founding Neo-evangelical influence which advocated social-political change via the institution of the church could be cited, but even though one of the major tenets of Neo-evangelicalism is social involvement and reform (similar to the emphasis of Theological Liberalism, but void of its doctrinal heresy), the leaders once again, nonetheless, provide no scriptural basis for social involvement. The leadership overlooks the extremely simple and profound insight and model of Luke chapter 3. Conclusively, Neo-evangelicalism is not the best way to change culture; it only detracts from the most excellent, God-given means of doing that: evangelize the lost as did John the Baptist.

## VI. WRONG WAY NUMBER 5: THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

The attempts by Evangelicals to change the cultural direction of America through political involvement perhaps bloom more fully in the mid-1970s than ever before. From the immediate previous era of Neo-evangelicalism in American church history comes the next period: the era of the Religious Right. Fundamentalist pastor Jerry Falwell founds the Moral Majority.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter, Televangelist Pat Robertson takes the mantle of leadership via the auspices of his Christian organization, The Christian Coalition, founded in the mid-1980s. And then approximately 10 years later, Focus on the Family's Dr. James Dobson takes that baton. The latter's organization published the book *Why You Can't Stay Silent: A Biblical Mandate to Shape Our Culture*.<sup>18</sup> Dr. Dobson is no longer at the helm of

Focus on the Family nor did he write this book.

I should first couch what I am about to say with this: while alive, Dr. Jerry Falwell was a good friend of mine, as are Dr. Robertson and Dr. Dobson, to this day. I love these men. Focus on the Family's book is the first major attempt by Evangelicals to provide a biblical basis for cultural involvement by the institution of the church. (Per my earlier endnotes in the copy, Neo-evangelical author and theologian Carl F. Henry and Lusanne Covenant author and theologian, Martyn Lloyd Jones, both fail to write any sort of convincing "social engagement theology" at earlier dates.) But in *Why You Can't Stay Silent*, no mention is made of Luke chapter 3. The fact is that the primacy of evangelism leads to societal change like nothing else.<sup>19</sup>

## VII. SUMMARY

Luke chapter 3 reveals how the individual believer and the institution of the church best go about efforts to change culture. The best way the church should relate to the state is via evangelism! The state needs it; the institution of the church has it, and the culture changes for the better because of it!

The Puritans, although motivated primarily by Postmillennialism, out of necessity, did a lot of evangelism. And because they did, America was founded with a dynamism and power unmatched in world history. America came out of nowhere to become the leading nation of the world. The primary basis of this momentum was the evangelism of the soul.

**Today we still ride the wave of the early American church's emphasis on evangelism, which greatly affected and influenced our Founding Fathers.**

But that tsunami of the Puritan influence has lessened greatly over the years due to all the epochs of American church history that followed wherein we have been unable to dial it correctly ever since. Theological liberals lost their doctrine as they sought to influence America with a manufactured gospel of their own making. Fundamentalists had the gospel right but retreated from culture. Neo-evangelicals, in their attempt to right the wrong of Fundamental sectarianism, still failed because their solution was void of the primacy and simplicity of evangelism. And the Religious Right movement, although full of sincere passion, also underemphasized the simplicity and focus of evangelism as it spent the energy of the church trying to change laws rather than working to change the hearts of the lawmakers.

Will the next epoch of American church history—one that I think is about to begin—be characterized by the priority, simplicity, and profundity of evangelism, or will we somehow miss out on this singular emphasis once again? As we contemplate this matter, we must consider the cultural results of the great evangelist, John the Baptist!



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1. *New American Standard Bible*: 1995 update. 1995 (Lk 3:3–14). LaHabra, Calif.: The Lockman Foundation. Used with permission.
2. “What is today a matter of academic speculation begins tomorrow to move armies and pull down empires.” (J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” *Princeton Theological Review* 11 [1913], 7). The Religious Right movement emphasized policy change to such a heightened degree that evangelism of souls in the capital community was eclipsed.
3. George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 112.
4. Arthur Cushman McGiffert as quoted by George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 50.
5. A theological discussion pertaining to the strengths and weaknesses of Post-millennialism warrants its own Bible study at another time.
6. George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 185.
7. Quoted from Gundry.
8. Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36.
9. *Ibid*, 11.
10. Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955). Author’s note: I must add that I have not fully studied Machen and whether he develops his arguments for social exclusion from Scripture.
11. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 156.
12. *Christian Life Magazine*, Vol. 17, No. 11, March 1956.
13. *Ibid*.
14. *Ibid*.
15. Note that I differentiate between the institution of the church and individual believers. Obviously, individual believers should be involved in societal change—every believer in office is about that pursuit! But when it comes to the primacy of the calling of the institution of the church, the institution must be obedient to God’s identified purpose for it.
16. This is the same problem with the Lausanne Covenant, wherein Evangelicals agree in writing that Evangelicalism should have two emphases of similar priority, both personal evangelism and social engagement. However, even though Martyn Lloyd Jones was assigned the responsibility for writing the undergirding theology for social engagement by the institution of the church, no such theological treatise was ever submitted by him and attached to the Lausanne Covenant.
17. *Falwell: An Autobiography* (Lynchburg: Liberty House Publishers, 1997).
18. Tom Minnery, *Why You Can’t Stay Silent: A Biblical Mandate to Shape Our Culture*, Tyndale House, January 2001.
19. One of the primary arguments in “*Why You Can’t Stay Silent...*” is the use of Matthew 5, relative to salt and light. But very importantly and in support of the thesis of this study, salt and light, i.e., the believer’s cultural influence in the world, stems from and is directly proportional to his beatitudinal behavior. The beatitudes, which depict a converted individual, are sequentially prior to the salt and light passages in Matthew 5. In essence then, Matthew 5 reveals the same understanding as does Luke 3: conversion leads to cultural change! This repetitious biblical formula for cultural change is also depicted in 1 Timothy 2:1–4, wherein “a tranquil and quiet life” in the here and now stems from evangelism. It follows that it is exegetically impossible (utilizing a grammatical-historical-normative hermeneutic) to construct a theology for cultural change apart from evangelism of the lost. It should come as no surprise as to why the Lausanne Covenant promoting Evangelical social engagement by the institution of the church is void of a theologically based underpinning.

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