**“The Gospel of America or the Gospel of Jesus:**

**What Informs and Influences You?”**

**Why This Bible Study?**

1. Some are frustrated with me

“**Pastor, you must say something!**”

From the “conservative right” I get peppered to make a public and pulpit stand against what they call the “Bleeding-Heart Liberals” as summed up in an article given to me written the by De Jong Distinguished Visiting Professor of Culture and Theology, Edinburg Theological Seminary, Rev. P. Andrew Sandlin. He writes:

“Our country is dangerously adrift – a monster federal government, erosion of states’ rights, abortion, pornography, gay “marriage,” euthanasia, Obamacare, increased gun control laws- and we are committed to doing something about it…I’d like to persuade you today…You can be a political activist and good Christian at the same time. I’ll be even bolder: you cannot be a good Christian unless you’re zealously conservative.”

From the “liberal left” I get peppered to make a public and pulpit stand against what they call the “Heartless Conservatives” as summed up in an article given to me written by the presiding bishop of the ELCA, Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton:

“Currently, more than 25 governors are opposed to allowing Syrian refugees into their states…I urge the members or our church to call upon our elected officials to be leaders in speaking up for refugees already persecuted and traumatized and ensuring that our country continues to reflect the principles and values of a nation committed to freedom. The legacy of our welcome to refugees is that our economy, social fabric, communities and nation as a whole are stronger.”

**Nobody is asking what would Jesus do?**

1. I am frustrated with some

**“People, this is NOT what Jesus would do!”**

From extremists I get peppered with “cross the line” comments as summed up in an article from The Atlantic written by Jonathan Merritt | Dec 6, 2015:

“At Liberty’s convocation service on Friday, the school president, Jerry Falwell Jr., responded to the San Bernardino shooting, saying, ‘If more good people had concealed-carry permits, then we could end those Muslims before they walked in and killed them.’ He encouraged students to enroll in the university’s gratis certification course and said he was carrying a weapon ‘in my back pocket right now.’ He concluded by saying, ‘Let’s teach them a lesson if they ever show up here.’”

**Nobody is asking what would Jesus do?**

1. The Church is frustrated with decline

**“Pastor, why is our church in decline?**

From the Church I get peppered with questions like: Why are people leaving? Why do we continue to decline? Why aren’t we growing? Where is everybody? What can we do to turn this around?

George Barna, Churchless: “According to the Churchless data, in the 1990s, 30% of the American population was unchurched. Today, two decades later, that percentage has risen to more than four in 10 Americans (43%).”

**Nobody is asking what would Jesus do?**

**What Is “The Gospel of America?”**

1. We’re talking about “Contextualization” of our faith and life
   1. Contextualization – Translating the never-changing Gospel of Jesus into an ever-changing, dynamic culture
   2. The “Gospel of America” is the erroneous obscuring or synchronizing of the Gospel of Jesus with American culture
2. Two dangerous pitfalls of contextualization: Obscurantism and Syncretism
   1. **Obscurantism** – is obscuring the Gospel of Jesus by emphasizing things that are actually external to the Gospel as being central to it.

* “You cannot be a good Christian unless you’re zealously conservative” - Sandlin
* In a meeting less than a month ago I heard a member say, “I’m sorry I’m a Democrat”
* God = Republican
* “People see a direct, correlative relationship between the Republican party and the Christian faith – and that’s a bad thing if you want people to know that the Gospel of Jesus is not politics”[[1]](#footnote-1) – Ed Stetzer
* “As Christians, we must be careful not to obscure the gospel for the sake of an idea or truth that is less important. Your view on the Affordable Care Act or the next election may seem important to you; but maybe it shouldn't reach the level where you need to post on it three times a day and question the motives of people on other side, particularly in the name of your faith. You can go ahead and complain on Facebook about who shut down the government if you'd like, but you might just unknowingly shut down a much more important conversation.” – Ed Stetzer
* It’s all about Jesus!
  1. **Syncretism** – is synchronizing (mixing) the Gospel of Jesus with something else such that they become a different gospel.
* “The founding fathers, as representatives of God, entitle me to the pursuit of happiness
* God + Happy = God wants me to be happy
* “So there is this danger in walking the fine line of contextualization where error awaits on either side—obscurantism on the one and syncretism on the other…Both errors are dangerous as each leads to a false gospel.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Nothing New: A Biblical example of poor contextualization – “The Gospel of Pharisees”

Mark 7:1-13

* Obscurantism: To follow God = ceremonial washing
  + If you don’t wash, you don’t follow God!
  + Obscuring the Gospel by emphasizing ceremonial washing
  + “*You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions*”
* Syncretism: God + Corban = No longer do anything for father or mother
  + If you devote money to God you don’t need to care of father and mother
  + “*Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that*.”

**What does the Gospel of Jesus say about…**

Refugees and Immigrants?

Widows, Orphans, and the Needy?

Enemies?

Church and State?

Life’s Rights?

1. The Exchange Blog: July 8, 2014 “Contextualization: Beware of Obscurantism” | Christians must not obscure the gospel by seeing other issues as more important. | Ed Stetzer [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Exchange Blog: July 15, 2014 “Contextualization: Avoiding the Pitfall of Syncretism” | Churches and pastors must respect the razor's edge between obscurantism and syncretism.” | Ed Stetzer [↑](#footnote-ref-2)