Faith that sees through culture

Lesson 1: A struggle with what is outside

# Getting going

1. What is the most significant example of evil that you have run into lately? (either personal or a story from another place)
2. What made you sure that example of evil really was an example of evil?

With that in mind, here is a brief intro from the author to our study and this week’s lesson.

“Faith, while it eventually impacts every faculty of a person – *including* the will (so that faith is experienced also in the will) - is not reduced to an action of the will. It is a gift from God that God must bring into existence. This is why the old Lutheran teachers described faith as a *spiritual organ*. Just as God created one’s heart and lungs, God created one’s faith. As the heart pumps blood, faith pumps prayer, service, witness,” obedience, generosity and so much more.... “Faith sees what is otherwise unseen; faith *knows* what otherwise is unknown. This is what created faith does. It is the ability to perceive the things of God that the rest of the world considers to be non-sense. Such seeing …. does not assume that the culture itself is bad. … Culture includes everything that fills our everyday lives in our day-to-day existence and where we live. It includes what we eat, what we listen to, how we live together; how we work and how we play; and how we dress and how we communicate. Culture is pervasive. Along the way, it is for the Christian to live in it.” (Alfred Espinosa, *Faith that Sees Through Culture,* pg 16-20)

# Getting the Word into our lives

Lesson 1 deals with a common struggle: the struggle to live with the things outside of us

1. God seems to offer two (or more) contradicting messages about the world and the things outside of us. Consider these passages as just a small example:

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31)

“Do not love the world or anything in the world” (1 Jn 2:15)

“For this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:31)

In your own words, what might be the contradicting messages from God we have to consider about the world?

1. What are some different ways people take in these messages (even if they don’t know they come from the Bible!) and respond to the world?
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For some help, here is one description of three possible options. Can you think of any examples of each?

Isolation, Domination, or Incarnation

* Isolation takes place when a Christian or church is so far removed from culture that it can no longer communicate the good news in effective ways.
* Domination occurs as a Christian or church lashes out harshly at what are perceived as evil aspects of culture.
* Incarnation happens when a Christian or church adapts itself in appropriate ways to its culture, so that it receives a hearing for the gospel. Jesus told us to be fishers of men (Mt 4:19; Mk 1:17).
1. The author comments about all these responses, “This external one-two punch (the author is writing about the devil and the general sinful corruption of the world), confronts us both individually and corporately. And when it happens, it is easy for even lifelong Christians to enter a faith crisis. We’re living in this mess and it’s not difficult to find Christians bewildered as to how to live out their faith in a world so dead set against it.” Do you agree – that it is easy to enter a “faith crisis”? Do you think we are in a crisis?
2. The simple biblical answer to this crisis is two-fold. First, God has conquered the devil and sin in the death of Jesus and his victorious resurrection. Second, God’s objective message about sin and death becomes part of our subjective reality. “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23) An objective truth has changed our subjective reality. Both are changed. What are some ways this objective – subjective dichotomy answers the struggle of the external sin/devil attacks?

“Through the Word of Christ, Holy Absolution, and the intentional return to her Holy Baptism into Jesus Christ, I witnessed – over time – a transformation. Where hopelessness once reigned, faith rose up, and I saw my sister in Christ become stronger than she had ever been.” (Alfred Espinosa, *Faith that Sees Through Culture,* pg 16-20)

# Going forward in faith

Split into groups of 2 or 3.

10. What’s a passage from this Scripture that impacted you?

11. How are you going to respond to this message?

12. Who is one person you’d like to share this with?