Sunday Equipping

Perimeter CHURCH

Quick Table Discussion

At your table, introduce yourself and share one interesting fact about yourself.
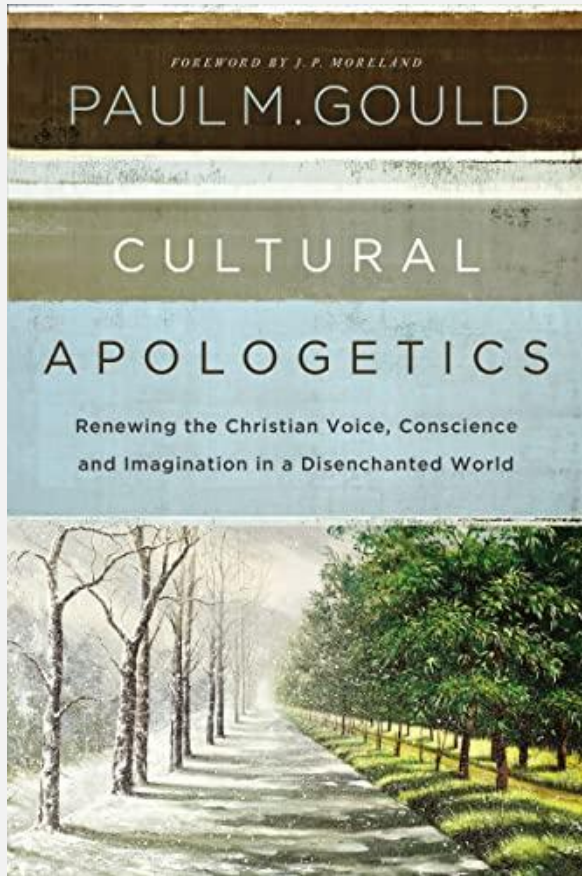
Cultural Apologetics

"What the apologist must practice is not simply intellectual argumentation but cultural apologetics. Apologists must show that Christianity is not only true but that it is good and beautiful. Therefore, they must engage the intellect, imagination, and conscience."

- Jacob Haywood summarizing Paul M. Gould

Cultural Apologetics

Week 1: Polarization
Week 2: Consumerism
Week 3: The Self-Made Person
Week 4: Deconstruction

1 Peter 3:13-17

13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Titus 2:7-8

7 Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, 8 and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

James 3:5-10

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

Study and Discussion

On your own:
- Read back through these three passages and make observations and note any questions that come to your mind about these passages.
- What do you notice about the character that a follower of Christ is called to in the face of "opponents"?

As a Table:
- Share at least one takeaway you have from these passages.

Polarization: What's Going On

"In full disclosure, I'm one of those political scientists, among other social observers, who thinks the most important feature of our deep political divides is not ideology or policy preferences—liberal versus conservative, pro-choice versus pro-life—but our deep-seated emotional responses to group identity. Polarization is tribal. But that tribalism is not merely about intense loyalty to partisan groups. Indeed, to the extent the United States has become *more* divided, the story is less about commitment to *us* than rejection of *them*. The evidence about party identification illustrates the point. It turns out that Republicans and Democrats are not entirely sure what to make of their own parties; they identify with them, but many "partisans" are not especially emotionally invested in the parties themselves.

Polarization: What's Going On

Those partisans are, however, obvious in their forthright disdain—not disagreement, but *disdain*—for the opposition. Stanford's Political Communication Lab, the Pew Research Center, and several other scholarly teams have chronicled soaring cross-partisan antipathies over the past three decades. The upshot is that, while polarization in the United States is partly about loyalties to groups, the increase in negative evaluations of the opposition accounts for most of the widening partisan gap."

- Kevin den Dulk, *Isolation and the Prospects for Democracy: The Challenge for the Alienated*

Polarization: What's Going On

We're not talking about
- Honest disagreement
- Standing against evil
- Genuine convictions

Polarization: What's Going On

Group Identity
- Demonization
- Cancel Culture
- False Dichotomies

Technology and Relational Breakdown
- Anonymity and relationship
- Volume of content
- The voices that get amplified

Group Identity

In a recent article in Comment magazine, Kevin R. den Dulk explains how markers of political identity often help us know what we are not, but usually don't give us confidence in who we are. In other words, our isolation and fragmentation lead us to create a self-understanding based in opposition toward others, a negative view of "what we are not" instead of a positive understanding of what we really stand for. He writes:

The markers of political identity [worked] as alarm bells, not invitations. Difference was more telling than co-partisanship. The key question was not whether [someone] was one of us, but whether he was one of them.

-Trevin Wax, *Why Are We So Politically Polarized?*

Group Identity

"So social media are not primarily about public discussion of ideas. The ideas are ways to define oneself and signal belonging to a group, as well as to assign identities to others by associating them with groups you oppose. This is the reason social media have perfected the art of bad-faith readings—interpreting a person's words in the most uncharitable sense possible. There is no effort to understand the argument in its strongest form and respond to it. Rather, the goal is to associate the thinker with shameful 'out-groups.'"

- Timothy Keller, *Can Social Media Foster Persuasion (Not Polarization)? Review: 'Breaking the Social Media Prism' by Chris Bail*

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Technology and Relationship

"If there is one word that sums up the crisis of personhood in our time, for the powerful and powerless alike, it is loneliness. Like Ernest Hemingway's character who went broke "gradually and then suddenly," modern people and societies have suddenly become acutely aware that we are relationally bankrupt.

Physicians see it: Vivek Murthy, surgeon general of the United States under Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden, wrote in the Harvard Business Review in 2017, "During my years caring for patients, the most common pathology I saw was not heart disease or diabetes; it was loneliness." Politicians see it: Ben Sasse, the Harvard-trained historian who became a U.S. senator for Nebraska, argued in his 2018 book, Them: Why We Hate Each Other—and How to Heal, that the actual root of the conflicted, polarized politics of the United States is loneliness…

Technology and Relationship

…Businesses see it, because there is big money in offsetting loneliness: "Objective social isolation" costs the U.S. Medicare system $6.7 billion annually, according to one study.

Along with this claim, someone is sure to observe that "we have never been so connected—and never so lonely." And indeed, those of us who eagerly joined Facebook and other platforms during the social media explosion of the 2000s could hardly have imagined that we were actually going to feel more alienated, not less, all these years later. Is it coincidence, or just a kind of grand irony, that loneliness has spiked just as our media became "social," our technology became "personal," and our machines learned to recognized our faces?"

- Andy Crouch, <u>The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World</u>, p.14-15

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Amplification

"Bail notes that 6 percent of all Twitter users generate 20 percent of all tweets and 70 percent of all tweets that mention national politics—and these 6 percent are mainly from the extremes (76). That is not a surprise. What is illuminating, however, is the research Bail presents about so many of those who take loud and extreme positions on the internet.

Amplification

First, the research shows that those taking extreme positions have what Erving Goffmann has called a "spoiled identity." In real life, they have not done well. Extremists "often lack status in their off-line lives" and have experienced marginalization (56).

Second, their online personas are often far different (much more aggressive) than are their personalities in off-line life (56).

Third, they are usually strongly opposed to being identified as extremist (though they are in the 5–10 percent)."

- Timothy Keller, *Can Social Media Foster Persuasion (Not Polarization)? Review: 'Breaking the Social Media Prism' by Chris Bail*

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What do we do?

How does Jesus *see* people?

Matthew 9:36-38

36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Study and Discussion

Look back over Luke 7:36-50

- How does Simon see the woman?
  - What assumptions might he be making about her? About her potential inclusion in his religious group?
  - What would mark her "in" or "out" of his group?
- How does Simon see Jesus?
  - Before the woman arrives?
  - After the woman arrives?
- What does Jesus see?
  - How does Jesus treat Simon and how does he treat the woman?
  - What is culturally surprising about the way Jesus deals with the situation?
  - What are the markers for being "in" Jesus' group?

What do we do?

1. See People
2. Live in your gospel-identity

Live in Your Gospel-Identity

"Loosen the links between your ideas and your identity.

See 2 Tim. 2:24–26. Don't make your ideas into an identity such that any disagreement feels like an attack on your very being. Here, I'm afraid we can see Christians being "conformed to the pattern of this world" (Rom. 12:2) by letting the social media prism forge their identity.

Christian identity is not a performance—it is a free gift of God's unchanging love and regard on the basis of Christ's perfect performance. This is why Paul can say: "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor. 4:3–4, NIV).

Live in Your Gospel-Identity

See how Paul does not get either furious or deflated by what others think of him. But it is not based on his self-assessment, either. Jesus was judged in Paul's place and now he can know God accepts him in Christ (see all of Romans).

Paul (and Jesus too) can speak sharply to opponents, but it is never out of lost temper, or threatened identity. Christians, however, often get sucked into social media tribes and allow the prism to assign them a distorted identity. But as Paul says, we have the resources for a profoundly secure identity and self-worth that makes us able to speak gently or sharply to opponents—not based on our anger or offendedness but strictly on the basis of what they need."

- Timothy Keller, *Can Social Media Foster Persuasion (Not Polarization)? Review: 'Breaking the Social Media Prism' by Chris Bail*

What do we do?

1. See People
2. Live in your gospel-identity

Romans 5:6-8
6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

What do we do?

1. See People
2. Live in your gospel-identity

Matthew 5:43-45a

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

What do we do?

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What do we do?

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Romans 12:18-21

18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

"I am convinced that many of the theological battles on Twitter are motivated not by a love for theology after all but by self-glory. When ruling your heart, the truths of the word of God will never produce cruel mockery, angry accusations, or willingness to judge motives or assail another's' character. Using words to harm is not the fruit of good theology. Theology that does not produce love is simply bad, God-dishonoring, and unbiblical theology. The desire to be a social media truth vigilante is not motivated by God's honor and glory or his magnificent truth but by self-glory. Self-glory often masquerades as a fight for what is right. If you find pleasure in the battle and you love the kill, it's probably not God's glory that's driving you, because he is slow to anger and lavish and love.

If tenderness, gentleness, kindness, patience, and love seem like weakness to you, it's doubtful that the glory of God is shaping how you act, react, and respond. I think the toxic reactivity of Christians--often toward other Christians--on social media is a constant warning to us that the kingdom of self does a good job of masquerading as the kingdom of God. May we be humble enough to search our hearts. Perhaps as we post, it is not God we're serving after all."

-Paul Tripp, <u>Reactivity: How the Gospel Transforms Our Actions and Reactions</u>, p. 87

What do we do?

1. See People
2. Live in your gospel-identity
3. Listen

James 1:19-20
Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Listening

What resonates in the culture? Why?

Learning to affirm and challenge?

Crawling in my skin
These wounds, they will not heal
Fear is how I fall
Confusing what is real

There's something inside me
That pulls beneath the surface
Consuming, confusing
This lack of self control I fear is never ending
Controlling, I can't seem

To find myself again

My walls are closing in

Without a sense of confidence

I'm convinced that there's just too much pressure to take

I've felt this way before, so insecure

Crawling in my skin
These wounds, they will not heal
Fear is how I fall
Confusing what is real

Discomfort, endlessly has pulled itself upon me

Distracting, reacting

Against my will, I stand beside my own reflection

It's haunting, how I can't seem

To find myself again

My walls are closing in

Without a sense of confidence

I'm convinced that there's just too much pressure to take

I've felt this way before, so insecure

Crawling in my skin
These wounds, they will not heal
Fear is how I fall
Confusing what is real

(There's something inside me)
(That pulls beneath the surface)
(Consuming)
Confusing what is real
(This lack of self control I fear is never ending)
Controlling
Confusing what is real

Discussion

Looking at the lyrics and listening to the song:

- What can you affirm?

- What would you challenge?

- If you could have a conversation with the songwriters about the gospel, where would you start?

Discussion

Pair up with one other person and share you biggest takeaway from this morning.