

Putting the Culture Wars in a Multigenerational Perspective

It's the question I've heard now for many years, specifically from evangelical Christians: "Since the world is only getting worse, why bother fighting the culture wars? What's the use? What's the point? Isn't it better for us simply to share our faith and prepare for the return of Jesus?"

To be sure, if I knew for a fact that Jesus was coming back in a week, I would not spend that week writing articles about transgender activism. Or trying to change hearts about abortion.

In fact, I would not spend that week teaching a class in our ministry school. Or sharpening my Arabic or Babylonian reading skills. Or even hanging out with other believers.

Instead, I would spend every last moment reaching out to friends and relatives who were not in right relationship with God, urging them to repent and believe. And I would prepare my own heart to meet the King.

The fact is, though, we don't know if Jesus is coming back in a week. Or a year. Or a decade. Or a century.

What we do know is that we have one life to live. One live to serve. One live to make an impact. And then we die, and the baton is handed over to the next generation. And then the next.

That has been the cycle of life for millennia, and it will continue until the end of this age.

Unfortunately, many Christians are so focused on the world to come that they lose sight of the importance of living fruitful lives in the here and now. And many others are so focused on

the return of Jesus that they fail to live with long-term vision. They fail to ask what kind of world they are leaving to their children and grandchildren.

There's an interesting quote attributed to Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai (30 BC-90 AD): "If you have a sapling in your hand, and someone says to you that the Messiah has come, stay and finish the planting, and then go to greet the Messiah" (Avot d'Rabbi Natan 31b).

In other words, continue to live your life in a normal, productive way. Be faithful to your current responsibilities. Don't get caught up with end-time speculation. Planting a tree means you're thinking of tomorrow.

Similarly, it is recorded that evangelist D. L. Moody (1837-1899) was asked, "What would you do today if you knew Jesus Christ was coming tomorrow?"

He answered, "I would plant a tree."

Knowing that Moody was a great soulwinner, it's hard to imagine that, if he really knew Jesus was coming tomorrow, he would plant that tree.

But again, that's the point. We don't know. And so we plant the tree today, knowing it will grow tomorrow, even after we are long gone. That's the cycle of life.

To bring this back to the culture wars, it's crucial that we think in multigenerational terms, especially in light of end-time pessimism. In other words, since many Christians believe that we're in the final generation and things will only get worse, they expect cultural defeat.

It's like a person with terminal cancer in hospice care. Hope for recovery is gone. Just make them comfortable until they pass away.

In the case of the culture wars, many feel that the return of

Jesus is imminent and therefore the complete collapse of culture is also imminent. The dam is ready to burst. Why waste our time plugging the holes?

But this misses the whole point.

First, to repeat, none of us knows for sure when Jesus is coming back. That's a simple fact.

When I came to faith in late 1971, we were told that all the prophecies were in place and the Second Coming was at the door. That was almost 50 years ago. I was 16 at the time. Today, our oldest granddaughter is 19 and a student at Liberty University.

Who can guarantee, based on Scripture, that Jesus will come within the next 10 or 50 or 100 years?

Second, an excellent biblical case can be made for the end of the age being marked by great light and great darkness. Great spiritual harvest and great apostasy. Great revival and great falling away.

Who's to say we can't be part of a great revival?

Third, what we do know is that, like every generation before us, if the Lord doesn't return in our lifetimes, we will be handing the baton to the next generation.

How did we live our lives? Did we make things better or worse? Were we good stewards over our freedoms or did we become enslaved?

Forget about "winning" or "losing" the culture wars, since there is hardly ever a total victory or defeat.

Instead, ask yourself about direction. Which direction is the society going?

Have we, through preaching the gospel, winning the lost,

making the disciples, and being salt and light, helped our nation go in a positive direction? Have we helped raise moral standards? Are people more conscious of God? More compassionate?

Are families stronger? Are we leaving a godly legacy to our children? Have we raised up schools, ministries, businesses, organizations or churches that are making a lasting difference?

And so we stand up and fight for what is right. It is who we are. It is what we do.

Yes we, God's people, are the moral conscience of the society and the light of the world. But if we fail to shine the light, there will be cultural deterioration. And then, eventually, cultural collapse.

That would mean great suffering and hardship for our kids and their kids and then their kids. That would mean moral confusion and spiritual bankruptcy and social anarchy. That would be real tragedy.

Put another way, if we fail to plant our saplings today, there will be no trees tomorrow. And without trees, the world cannot exist.

So go ahead and plant those saplings. And make that investment in the next generation.

We can reach the lost with an eternal message while also doing good in the here and now. We live today in the light of eternity. If we do, our children will bless us and thank us.