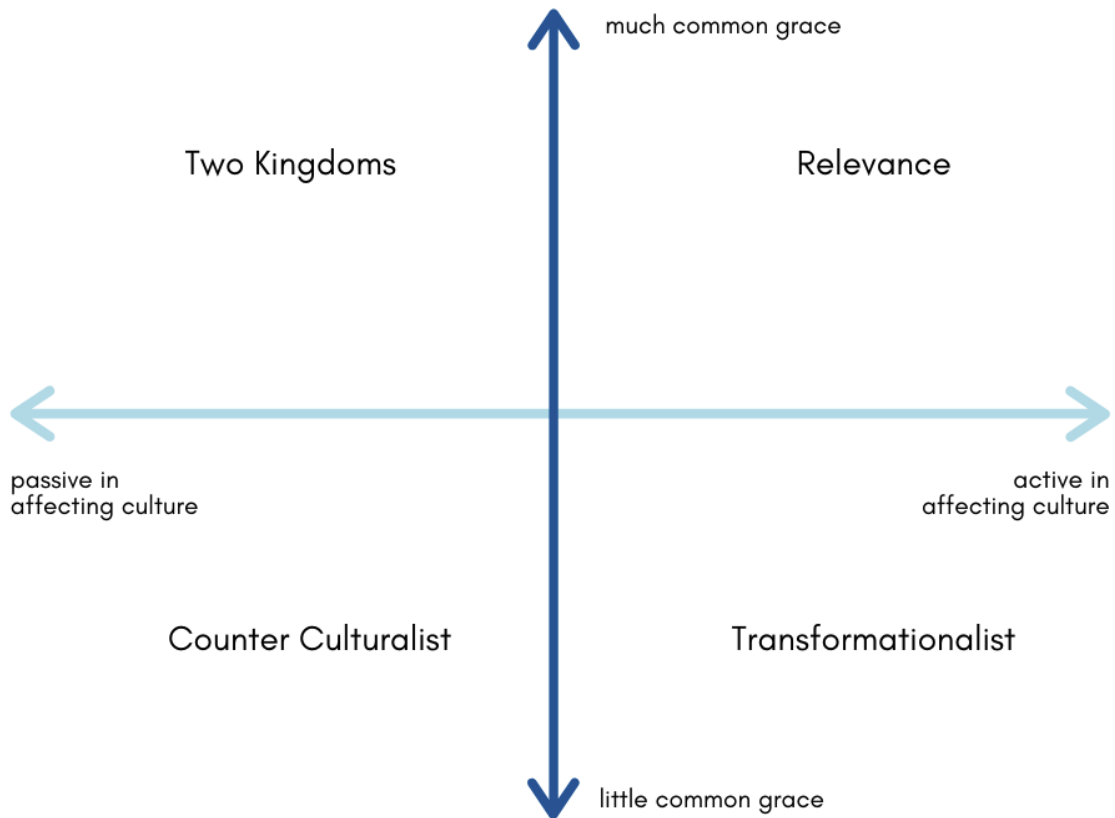


Gospel and Race

Week 4: Counter-Cultural Model

Four Quadrants Approach delineated by Tim Keller in Center Church
Applied to the context of Gospel & Race discussions within Hope Community Church, a 6-week study



Leader's note: The study passages are not connected 1-to-1 to the Keller material or quadrant under consideration that week. Rather each is biblical testimony regarding the Gospel and how it comes to bear in situations, teachings, parables, etc. which involve ethnicity/race. In that sense, themes of the bible and quadrant may overlap but it should not be assumed that the quadrant directly flows out of the biblical passage.

Introduction Questions

? A dominant identity marker of this group is withdrawing from culture. A contemporary example is Shane Claiborne. As with all decisions, the choice to withdraw from culture has consequences. What are some positive examples where the church has rightly withdrawn from culture? What are some negative examples where the church, having withdrawn from culture, has become increasingly irrelevant to culture? (Recognize, we might disagree with one another about whether an example put forward should be considered positive or negative.)

Video introduction from Cor: [Week 4 Video](#)

Study the Passage and Discuss

Philemon 8–21

⁸Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹ yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

¹² I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. ¹³ I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. ¹⁴ But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.

¹⁵ Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— ¹⁶ no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

¹⁷ So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. ²⁰ I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

? The name Onesimus means “useful”. This makes Paul’s comment in verse v.11 quite intriguing. Paul says, “Formerly he (Onesimus) was useless to you (Philemon), but now he (Onesimus) has become useful.” How do you understand this—that Onesimus was in their opinion deemed as “useless” when formerly Philemon’s servant but now Paul is imploring them to view him as “useful” on account of coming to faith in Christ?

Possible answers: Onesimus is a new creation in Christ; he is now a part of the family. Philemon should no longer regard him from a worldly vantage point—his usefulness being tied to his work for Philemon. Rather, true usefulness, as defined by the Lord, is connected to our relationship with the Lord.

? Paul, due to his authority as an apostle, could require Philemon’s obedience. Instead, he appeals to love (vv. 8-9) and Philemon’s voluntary response (v. 14). Why do you think this distinction matters in this case?

Possible answers: The nature of Paul’s relationship to Philemon is comparable to Philemon’s relationship with Onesimus. Both of the relationships show one who is in authority over another, Paul over Philemon and Philemon over Onesimus. But the ways of God—that Christ having all authority serves us in love—can be demonstrated through our earthly relationships. To the degree that Philemon is voluntarily willing to love Onesimus, not on account of an order by an apostle like Paul, Philemon reflects the gospel love that Jesus has shown us.

? It can safely be assumed that Onesimus robbed and then fled from Philemon. Paul serves as a type of Christ by incurring any debts of Onesimus (v. 18). Additionally, he indicates to Philemon that more consequential matters than theft and fleeing should be prioritized. List out as many of these as you can.

Possible answers: Paul seems to have incurred debts on behalf of Philemon (v.19) including his very life; so it seems to indicate the more significant matters of sin, separation from God, enslavement to the world/satan/etc., and separation from one another take precedent over earthly matters. It doesn't mean theft and fleeing are inconsequential. Sin always comes at a cost. But, sin shouldn't get the loudest or final word, God and his gospel should get the final word.

? What does it look like for the church to be this type of counter-cultural community, one that incurs the debts of their brothers and sisters in Christ? What are modern examples of debts that Christians can incur for the sake of their Christian brothers and sisters?

Possible answers: give of time to care for others, give to others, be with others, offer forgiveness

Additional Questions About the Paradigm

This week Pastor Cor described the Counter-Culturalist Model. A community within this quadrant experiences God's redemption, justice, and peace in their midst and becomes a prophetic sign against societal ills including racial injustice. This view stresses a horizontal way of life in community, at times, to the detriment of the vertical relationship with God and can minimize the potential within Christianity to instigate societal change.

? Are you able to share any examples (individual or corporate) where the church should be esteemed as a counter-cultural community within culture? In other words, what can we appreciate from this quadrant's contributions?

Possible answers: provide a safe space to be counter-cultural, create intentional community, lean into forgiveness

? Each quadrant has its limitations. What are one or two drawbacks about this quadrant which, if not balanced out by the other quadrants, could prove problematic in addressing issues of race? In other words, what should we challenge regarding this quadrant?

Possible answers: could be isolating, not engaging culturally, hard to engage corporately, risk the gospel being defined 'counter-cultural'

? This quadrant has been summarized with the word **abstaining** where the church stands in contrast to the culture, which has become corrupted and hijacked by worldliness. What other words might you use to describe this quadrant?

Possible answers: Answers will vary.

? Do any of you within this small group sense this quadrant may describe your preferred approach to cultural engagement? If so, are you willing to share what resonates deeply within this quadrant's approach?

Possible answers: Answers will vary.

Takeaway(s)

How do I want to grow in light of these things?

What am I asking the Lord to do with my heart and life in response to this study?

? You may view your own quadrant more favorably and other quadrants less favorably. Especially if the Counter-Culturalist Model (passive/little common grace) is not your primary way of engaging with culture, are you able to identify one aspect which you appreciate regarding their cultural engagement with issues of race?

? Imagine a church that is able to fully express this quadrant when corporately engaging cultural issues of race. How do you think such a church would be described? What difference might such a church make pertaining to issues of race?

? Given the testimony of Philemon 8–21, how might God want to deepen our hearts and expand our understanding of loving our neighbor, specifically those of a different ethnicity or race?

Accountability

? Share one thing you're thinking about or challenged by this week.

? What is one response you'd like to have regarding today's study that you'd like the group to check in with you next week?