

Lecture 2 – Cultural Settings of Christianity, A.D. 50-100

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. I Corinthians 1:26-30

Key Terms

Social models, slavery, cities, literacy, polytheism, emperor worship, mystery religions, Gnosticism, philosophy, family, morality

Objectives

- Describe in general terms the social, cultural, and religious context of New Testament writings
- Outline the importance of understanding the context for rightly understanding the content
- Identify some parallels between the New Testament world and our own

Preliminary Questions

- What are some characteristics about our culture that make it difficult for us to understand the Gospel? That make it easy to understand the Gospel? That make it difficult or easy to live in obedience to the Gospel?

Introduction

I. Goal: To See Christianity, and Read the Bible, in its Setting

II. Socio-Economic Setting

A. I Corinthians 1:26-30: Did Christianity start among the powerless, lower classes?

1. _____
2. _____

B. Two social models: the diamond (Modern Western) or the triangle (antiquity) models compared?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

C. Slavery

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

D. Life in Cities: Paul’s missions strategy

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

E. Literary level of New Testament and its readers

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. _____

III. Religious Setting: “Sirs, I see that you are very religious.”

A. Polytheism:

1. The sentinels:

2. Syncretistic:

a. _____

b. _____

3. Politically valuable: emperor worship

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. “The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosopher as equally false, by the magistrate as equally useful.” (Gibbon, *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*).

4. Ethically bankrupt:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

B. Emperor Worship

1. Theory and origins:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

2. The varied practice of the emperors:

a. Domitian:

b. Caligula: (Gaius or Caius)

c.

d.

3. A ritual / political rather than an ethical religion:

C. Mystery religions

1. More involved than emperor worship

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. A reading and your response

a. Initiation of a priest

b. What are your impressions?

c.

d.

3. Alternative interpretations

4. Some comparisons:

a. Paganism:

b. Christianity:

D. Gnosticism: (see I Timothy 2:8-15)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

E. Philosophical schools

1. Epicureans:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. Stoics and the language of NT deliberation:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

3. Working with hands

IV. Moral Setting (Family Discussion)

A. No family as we know it:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

B. Moral and immoral pagans

1. Sensuality

2. Entertainment

a. _____

b. _____

“This gives you a feel for the world into which the New Testament came: a world dark, very dark; a world that was religious, but a world that did not have light.”