**Emmanuel Covenant Church- July 25, 2012**

**Living in Sin… Well**

**Jeffery J. Ventrella, Esq.**

1. The Reality of Life in Babylon
   1. The God-hating Public Square
   2. The Courts
   3. The Church
2. **Living Life in Babylonian Exile**
   1. The Sovereignly Directed Exile
   2. The Collapsing Culture
   3. God’s Game Plan—Is Not Always Our Game Plan

*These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people,* ***whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile*** *from Jerusalem to Babylon. 2This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. 3The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. It said: 4"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles* ***whom I have sent into exile*** *from Jerusalem to Babylon:* ***5Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*** *8For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, 9for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord.*

*10"For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.* ***11For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*** *12Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, 14I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

Jeremiah 29:1-14 (ESV)

1. **Repairing the Ruins: God’s Game Plan**
   1. **Theology**: Normative—Orthodoxy: ***Whom Shall We Trust, Worship, Serve and Obey?*** **LOOK UP!**
   2. **Ethics**: Situational—Orthopraxis: ***How Then Shall We Live?*** **LOOK OUT!**
      1. Discard the Squatter Mentality
      2. Discard World Flight:

* ***Critique—***blogs are full of this
* ***Condemn***—“Taste not, Touch not!” moralism
* ***Copy---***uncritical aping; looking ONLY for a baptized version of “success”
* ***Consume***-- unthinking absorption and passivity
* ***Create—***stewarding ALL that we’ve been graciously given to ***Honor Jesus, the Creator and Redeemer, the one who “makes all things new” and “redeems us from lawlessness” (Rev. 21; Titus 2)****[[1]](#footnote-1)*
  1. Implication: *We* ***MUST******Live*** *both* ***Piously*** *AND* ***Competently***

*"If one wants to practice science for God's sake, the first condition is to practice it for its own sake, because that is the only way to learn it ...  It is the same with an art: one must have it before one can put it to God's service.  We are told that faith built the medieval cathedrals:* ***no doubt, but faith would not have built anything had there been no architects and craftsmen.****If it be true that the west front of Notre Dame is a raising of the soul to God, that does not prevent its being a geometrical composition as well: to build a front that will be an act of charity, one must first understand geometry.  We who acclaim the high worth of nature because it is God's work should allow our respect for it by taking as our* ***first rule of action that piety is never a substitute for technique****; for technique is that without which* ***the most fervent piety is powerless to make us of God's nature for God's sake****."*

Etienne Gilson[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Promote Society’s Core Building Block
2. Employ Intergenerational Strategies
3. Pray FOR Babylon
4. Seek Babylon’s Welfare [*Shalom*]:

[Yet], it is possible so to focus on the rescue and regeneration of ***individuals*** that ***we fail to see the temporally good things we can do to improve and transform some social structures***. ***One does not abolish slavery by doing nothing more than helping individual slaves.*** ***Christian educational and academic structures may help countless thousands develop a countercultural way of looking at all reality under the Lordship of Christ***. Sometimes a disease *can* be knocked out; sometimes sex traffic *can* be considerably reduced; sometimes slavery *can* be abolished in a region; sometimes engagement in the arts *can* produce wonderful work that inspires a new generation . . . ***More importantly, doing good to the city, [Jer. 29] doing good to all people . . . is part of our responsibility as God’s redeemed people in this time of tension between the “already” and the “not yet.”***[[3]](#footnote-3)

**THIS** sort of ***Engagement***, this ***Sort of Living***, is a ***Mark*** of ***Spiritual Maturity***

***Without*** Such ***Engagement***, we ***WILL*** be ***Spiritually Immature***:

***Christian maturity is tested by its willingness to go against the odds, to go against the intellectual and practical fashions in the service of the King. It is easy enough to be a Christian when that merely requires us to be nice people.*** But *love* for Jesus which is motivated by his great sacrifice, requires far more. It calls upon us to renounce what Scripture calls the “wisdom of the world,” the fashionable ideas and practices of our society, and to count them as rubbish for the sake of Christ. We honor those like ***Noah***, who built an ark though the world scoffed; like ***Abraham***, who set aside the evidence of his senses and the laughter of his own wife to believe that God would miraculously provide a son; like ***Moses***, who stood up to Pharaoh and brought him the word of God; like ***Daniel***, who faced lions rather than worship an earthy king; like ***Peter and John***, who told officials that “we must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29).[[4]](#footnote-4)

* 1. **Eschatology**: Personal—Orthopathos: ***In What Shall We Hope?*** **LOOK FORWARD!**

**Public Justice and Legal Reformation**

* 1. Beware: Deception Abounds—Especially for the Religious

***4Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'*** *5"For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds,* ***if you truly execute justice one with another,*** *6if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, 7then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. 8"****Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail****. 9Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, 10and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? 11Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord.*

Jeremiah 7:4-11 (ESV)

*To IGNORE Public Justice is to* ***Compromise the Faith*** *by* ***Relegating it to Irrelevance****, as Peter Jones Notes:*

***A compromised church finds itself parked in a back alley of cultural irrelevance***. Meanwhile, other Christian groups have finally risen up to “defend the family” or to “fight for traditional values” and ***stand as unconscious accusers of the church***, which has sometimes equated the gospel with “Jesus died for our sins.” ***The Christian gospel has been truncated and diluted in two ways. It has become either a take-it-or-leave-it Christian version of contemporary ideology, or it remains a mere program for personal salvation—a high speed gospel train to heaven.*** As society implodes into lawlessness in the name of choice and freedom, Christian believers may no longer read the gospel through the “insights” of modern culture, nor may they dispense it as a “gos-pill” for aching souls. We must understand the scope and intentions of the gospel, not through the buzz words of *diversity* and *choice*, nor as a quick, one-way ticket “outta here,” but as the New Testament authors did, through a fully-worked-out biblical doctrine of creation.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Legal and Cultural Reformation Spur Spiritual Reformation:

***[A]s a matter of fact God usually exerts [his redemptive power] in connection with certain prior conditions of the human mind, and it should be ours to create, so far as we can, with the help of God, those favorable conditions for the reception of the gospel. False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion.*** *[[6]](#footnote-6)*

1. Pentateuch
2. History
3. Wisdom
4. Prophets
5. New Testament

* Encountering the Messiah
* The Messiah’s church
* The Messiah’s commission
  1. Conviction; Justice, and the Messiah of Orthodoxy: ***Passionately Demonstrating Truth to WIN the World for Christ***

1. These categories are derived from Andy Crouch, ***Making Culture—Recovering Our Creative Calling*** (IVP 2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Thomistic philosopher from the 20th century. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ***Christ and Culture Revisited***, at 217, 218, footnotes omitted. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John M. Frame, ***The Doctrine of the Christian Life***, (P&R 2008), pp. 728,729. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Peter R. Jones, **Capturing the Pagan Mind**, p. 118, 119 (2003, Broadman and Holman) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. J. Gresham Machen*,* **Education, Christianity, and the State**(Hobbs, NM: The Trinity Foundation, 1995 [2nd ed.]), p. 51) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)