

AG's George O. Wood Shares His 'Deepest Concern' for the Church

The secular worldview and culture of this age differ radically from biblical faith and practice, and even oppose them. This worldview admits of no ultimate truth about reality—no God-created beginning or God-controlled ending of history, no inherent meaning or purpose to life. The culture is relativistic; anything goes as long as everyone agrees and no one gets hurt.

The cultural consequences of this worldview are devastating. Sin and its effects permeate our culture: sexual immorality and family breakdown, materialistic greed and indifference to the poor, complacency in the face of injustice, and violence as entertainment. When anything goes, someone always gets hurt.

How can my grandsons, Jacob and Reese, become men of God in the midst of this age? How can they become holy, knowing that “without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14, NIV)? Holiness in thought, word, deed and relationship is my greatest hope and deepest concern for my grandsons.

As pastors, you and I have the same hope and concern for our church members: How can they become increasingly holy? And what can we do to help them? Romans 12:1-2 answers both questions: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Sometimes when I survey the sin that permeates and deforms our culture, I cry for my grandsons, knowing the temptations that await them. They are becoming men of God in an age that disregards holiness, even dishonors it. As a pastor, I have cried for parishioners and staff members who have harmed themselves and others by falling to sin. Perhaps you have cried too.

But after the tears, as I look back on my own life and ministry, I also realize God has made it possible for us to make progress in holiness. In 1 Corinthians 6:8–11, Paul lists a variety of sins. Then he says, in some of the most hopeful words in Scripture, “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (v. 11).

In our preaching, let us speak to this end: that our church members, our family members and we ourselves might increasingly worship God in “the beauty of holiness” (Ps. 29:2, KJV) through our thoughts, words, deeds and relationships.

Numerous worldviews and cultures compete for attention in the marketplace of ideas. As pastors, we must prepare our church members to be discerning consumers within this marketplace, knowing how to look past the slick marketing and fancy packaging of ideas to see whether the intellectual product itself is God-honoring, true and good.

In a pluralistic culture, preaching holiness requires preaching doctrine—both theological and ethical—and apologetics. Our church members will not continue to behave according to biblical standards if their thought lives ignore, misunderstand or willfully repudiate them. We must aim for changing people’s minds.

George O. Wood *is general superintendent of the Assemblies of*

God.