

Are You a Cultural Christian or a Biblical Christian?

Christianity is flourishing. There are more Christians today in America than ever before, both as a percentage and in total numbers. Roughly one in three Americans indicate they have asked Jesus to forgive their sins and grant them the gift of eternal life.

Here's the question: If religion is such a big part of our lives, why isn't it making more of an impact on our society? The sad reality is that claims of religious commitment run high, but impact is at an all-time low.

Here's the problem: Although Christianity is flourishing, many of us who are Christians have gotten caught up in this increasingly bankrupt culture. We have adopted many of the values of the world around us. Maybe it's the new sexual ethics of cohabitation or pornography, rampant greed and materialism, or winking at the needs of the poor. Gal. 5:9 explains why adopting these values is a problem: "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough."

So when we try to have the best of both worlds, we exchange the truth of God for a lie and the glory of God for idols, we do what seems right in our own eyes, we get engrossed in the secular world, and we worship created things instead of the Creator.

The result? Cultural Christianity. Cultural Christianity means pursuing the God we want instead of the God who is. It is the tendency to be shallow in our understanding of God, wanting Him to be more of a gentle-grandfather type who spoils us and lets us have our own way. It is sensing a need for God, but on our own terms. It is wanting the God we have underlined in our Bibles without wanting the rest of Him too. It is God relative

instead of God absolute.

What has been the result of this adaptive, cultural religion?

Two Kinds of Christians

The ease with which people now associate themselves with religion has produced two kinds of Christians: biblical Christians and cultural Christians.

Jesus was the first to clarify the different types of people who would or would not associate with Him. The parable of the sower reveals four groups of hearers of the Word of God.

Group 1: The Non-Christian

“Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12). Christ makes clear the point that not everyone who hears about salvation will believe.

Group 2: The Cultural Christian: Type ‘C’

“Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away” (Luke 8:13).

Type “C” stands for counterfeit faith. Among us are some who profess to be Christians, but in reality they are not Christians at all; they are cultural Christians—type “C.” They have a counterfeit faith—a faith that is not a genuine faith in Christ. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

Without sounding a false alarm, but in love, I encourage every man who finds himself to be a cultural Christian to consider whether his faith is merely a defeated faith or a counterfeit faith. If counterfeit faith is the condition of your life,

don't be discouraged. God loves you with an everlasting love and wants to reconcile with you.

Group 3: The Cultural Christian: Type 'D'

"The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature" (Luke 8:14).

Sadly, there is little marginal difference between the way many Christians spend their money and the way non-Christians spend theirs. For a group whose primary commission is to be salt and light to a broken, confused world, this example does little to present a viable alternative to empty lifestyles.

Type "D" stands for defeated faith. The type "D" cultural Christian lives in defeat. There is little, if any, marginal difference between his lifestyle and the lifestyle of the man who makes no claim to be in Christ. He has never understood, perhaps because he has never been told, the difference between what it means to be a cultural Christian versus a biblical Christian. This is the category I flirted with before God brought me to my senses.

Group 4: The Biblical Christian

"But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop" (Luke 8:15).

A biblical Christian is a person who trusts in Christ, and Christ alone, for his salvation. As a *result* of his saving faith he desires to be obedient to God's principles out of the overflow of a grateful heart (see Rom. 1:5). Obedience doesn't save us; faith does. This explains why some men can be cultural Christians—they have a saving faith, but they have not obediently made Christ Lord over all their lives. They have not allowed the Holy Spirit to empower them.

What does it mean to be a cultural Christian today?

Lessons from Elementary School

Do you remember your elementary school teacher demonstrating the principle of diffusion? She started with a clear glass of water. Then with an eyedropper she took some red food dye from a bottle and squeezed one drop into the glass. Within moments, the water was tainted with a pinkish hue as the dye permeated the water in the glass.

To be a cultural Christian in your parents' generation was to be like a clear glass of water with one drop of red dye. In other words, the secular culture was not that different from the Christian culture. That was before the days of Internet pornography, abortion on demand, explicit sex during prime-time TV, songs that degrade women, and a drug culture that's hard to avoid. So a man could be a cultural Christian and still be somewhat close to a Christian worldview and values.

To be a cultural Christian today is like having the whole bottle of red dye poured in the glass.

A Look in the Mirror

The man in the mirror will never change until he is willing to see himself as he really is, and to commit to know God as He really is. This objectivity anchors a man; it gives him the clarity of thought he needs to be a biblical Christian.

Is the man looking back at you in the mirror a cultural Christian or a biblical Christian?

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