

Does God Really Want You to Get Involved in Cultural Issues?

One of the greatest challenges that American Christians are currently facing concerns the question of how should they interact with present-day American culture. Many Christians are aware that there is a cultural shift occurring. Though American culture has never been fully “Christian” per se, today the culture is becoming increasingly anti-Christian. All anyone has to do is turn on prime-time television to see how the culture is promoting beliefs, activities, and lifestyles that are in total contradiction to the Bible and Christian living. Almost every week, there are news stories of Christian bakers, or photographers, being sued for refusing to participate in homosexual weddings or military chaplains being penalized for standing for biblical truth. It is clear that the divide between the “church” and the “world” is becoming more accentuated and more defined. Should Christians do nothing? Should Christians isolate themselves from the culture? How do Christians “be in” this culture, yet “not of it”?

Everyday, I read articles, interact on social media, and have conversations with other Christians about the current state of the culture. The underlying question that is always present is “How should we as Christians interact with the culture? There are many answers, but each answer falls into one of three different types of responses – a response of courage, a response of cowardice, or a response of complacency.

These are the three different basic responses that a Christian can have to culture. No Christian ever explicitly says “We should respond in complacency,” or “We should be cowards.” However, a lot of the responses that Christians have to the

culture are not courageous. Oftentimes, there are undertones of complacency or cowardice. If you haven't realized that the question of how to interact with the culture is a important one, all that I can say is, "It is!" However, even more important than the question is the answer to this question. The answer will determine the future of our nation and the health and spiritual vitality of the American church. The question I want to ask you right now is, "How are YOU responding to the culture?"

Before continuing and determining what would be the right response, let us look at what constitutes a complacent response. Sometimes the easiest thing to do in the midst of difficulty is to ignore it. It's a lot easier to not be bothered by what is wrong than to have to come up with the will power or means to change it. That is complacency at its finest.

People will also ignore problems because they are satisfied with their lives. Many Christians have adopted this mentality in response to the culture. It comes across as a cavalier, above-it-all type of attitude. If you have a good job, a nice car, a decent family, a steady stream of entertainment, and a church to go to each Sunday, then who cares about the problems in the culture? Right? "My life is good. Don't' bother me," is the slogan of this response to the culture. The problem here is that having a good life does not give anyone an excuse to not be "salt and light" (Matt. 5:13-16). In fact, if God has blessed you with a life that is not riddled with problems and concerns, He expects you to be more willing and able to serve Him and fulfill His purpose in reaching the culture. "To whom much is given much will be required."

Oftentimes, I hear people say things like, "It has always been bad, why try to change it?" I think the clearest answer is found by just taking a good look at God. If God had that mindset, He would have never intervened in human history and there would therefore have been no salvation and no Bible. If

God, Himself, doesn't take a "hands-off" approach, then why should we as His people? If someone was dealing with cancer for a while and there was a treatment to halt the spread of the cancer, they would never say "Well, it has been pretty bad for a while now. I guess I shouldn't try to stop this cancer from getting worse." That would be ridiculous. However, this is the illustration that best fits the complacent attitude of many Christians when they interact with the culture. The message of Christ is the cure for the sin destroying our culture and complacency is good at developing rationales for not taking responsibility to deliver this message to the culture and to the lost.

Complacency can also be seen to go hand-in-hand with the "God-is-sovereign" argument. This argument claims that there is nothing that we can do to change the culture because since God is really in control of everything anyhow, everything is happening just the way God wants it to. Its true, God is sovereign. But the entire New Testament is a call to action for the believer. Jesus said "Go out into all the world," "Preach the Gospel," "Make disciples." God's sovereignty is not an excuse for our inaction, rather, it's a promise that if we obey His call to act, He will move mightily.

If you were in a burning house, you would not lie in bed and say "God's got this under control; it's all part of His plan." You would rush out of bed, get everyone out of the house, and then call 911. If there was a way you could fight the fire, you would do it. There would be no room for complacency. Likewise, there is no room for complacency in a Christian's response to the culture. In Luke 19:13, part of the point Jesus makes in a parable is that the believer is to occupy until He returns.

Another way a Christian can respond to the culture is in cowardice. The anti-Christian sentiment within the culture can seem overwhelming at times. As Satan expands his influence in the world, it can easily produce fear. This fear exhibits

itself in several different ways. Some Christians embrace an isolationist mindset and try to avoid any and all interactions with the culture lest they be defiled by it. This is an incorrect response. Jesus made it clear that He overcame the world and that He is greater in us than the devil who is in the world. The Bible also says that we are more than conquerors and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. God has the power to change what we can't change, but if we cower and fear, we miss out on the opportunity to be participants in spreading God's influence within this culture.

Other Christians don't feel compelled to try to escape the world. However, they fear confrontation with the culture. This will often lead to compromise in order to avoid the difficulty, or trials, that would come from challenging it. This type of response doesn't deny Christ, but it also doesn't fully stand for Christ. Instead of standing firm on the word of God, a Christian that responds in fear and cowardice will try to find ways that they can fuse the "truths" of the culture with Christianity. At first glance, it seems noble, and many people probably tell themselves they are making their compromises in an attempt to reach and win the lost. However, nowhere in the Bible are the people of God called to compromise biblical and moral truth and to embrace the world in order to win the lost (1 John 2:15).

Countless Christians have bought into the lie that God is not concerned with anything outside of the salvation of the lost, so cultural issues really don't matter to Him and thus shouldn't matter to us. If Jesus Christ is Lord of the entire universe, and if He desires to do redemptive work in humanity, can someone really believe that God does not desire to use His people to establish more of His truth, righteousness, and order in the culture in which we live. Let us not forget Jesus' first sermon was Isaiah 61:1. What it really comes down to is that many Christians actually fear being labeled as

“radical” and fear being a source of offence to others. I am in no way suggesting that Christians should act strange, intentionally offend, or give cause for accusation from unbelievers, but the reality of the normal Christian life is that it is meant to be a radical one. We as believers are to love the sinners of the world, but we are not called to love the sin of the world. Jesus stood out, the disciples stood out, pretty much every character that we favorably look to in the Bible stood out. As they obeyed God courageously, they offended the culture around them, yet God was with them.

So that leaves us with our last possible response to the culture, one of courage. God calls His people to be courageous. Christ commanded believers to be salt and light. So how does the courageous Christian interact with the culture. The first and foremost principle is to never back down from standing upon and for biblical truth. The second principle is to assume responsibility for challenging, as lovingly and yet truthfully as possible, the current ungodly movements in the culture that promote what is clearly biblically unacceptable. Jesus said that he would send the Holy Spirit and that He would convict the world of sin. All too often, Christians cop-out on their responsibility and say “see it’s the Holy Spirit’s job to convict of sin.” But who lives in the believer? The Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy Spirit not only desires, but also expects, us to be His tools and instruments. The third principle that is necessary for a Christian to be successfully courageous is to count the cost ahead of time. When Christians commit to acting courageously in the culture, they will stand out. Sadly, oftentimes, not only the culture but other Christians will attempt to tear you down if you commit to challenging this culture in the truth and power of God. You have to be prepared to experience resistance, even from people who may name the name of Christ.

Courage is necessary in the day we live in. There is absolutely no room for cowardice or complacency. Be a

courageous Christian. Take the stands you know God wants His people to take even if you don't see the majority of other Christians doing it. As we are courageous, God will do mighty things in our culture and in our day-to-day lives. Jesus promised that He would be with us always even to the end of this age.

You might say "What can I do?" The answer is, do something! Start somewhere! Be honest with yourself. If you are being complacent, or cowardly, don't run away from it in shame. We all fall short of God's standard and expectations. If you have been complacent, or cowardly, repent, and then make a commitment to stand in courage. Ask God to help you to do this. Pray for God to give you opportunities to courageously stand for the Gospel and biblical truth. Encourage other believers to do likewise. Don't be afraid to shine the light of Christ wherever you are and wherever you go. So fellow Christian, believer, confessor of Jesus Christ as Lord, tell me, "Courage, cowardice or complacency, how will you respond to this culture? {eo}

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