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Pause Ponder Profit

Worldliness In The Church

by Bryan Vinson

Man is a creature of a dual nature. He is a product wrought by the conjoining of that which is of the earth with that which is from above. He has two minds, the carnal and the spiritual; he may be guided and controlled by either of two wisdoms—one which is earthly, sensual and devilish, or that which is from above which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and hypocrisy. The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be. God's law of redemption is addressed to the spirit of man, to that part of our being which is in the image of God. It appeals to our better nature, and aspires to excite within us those high and holy principles that develop and cultivate an interest in those things above. Our earthly nature, coming from and being dependent on the things of this earth may well assert a self-interest which intrudes injuriously on our superior interests. This is a basic recognition and explanation of much of the conflicting interests which war against each other in our lives. It offers an approach to the proper recognition of the just relation existing between the secular and spiritual.

Secular And Spiritual

Secularism is a term employed here to embody a general class of interest and things indigenous to the earth and earthly existence. We are dependent on the provisions of the earth for our physical life and the continuance of our temporal existence. The necessity of expending time, thought and energy in acquiring the physical necessities of life is one that is constant and unavoidable by all of us. The obligation to earn a living by honorable pursuits and productive efforts is incumbent on all men. We are told to provide things honest in the sight of all men. Christianity doesn't enjoin upon its adherents the disregarding of this life's responsibilities, but it certainly doesn't warrant a devotion of interest and effort of such a nature and extent as to relegate to a secondary place our interest in the Lord, His church and our individual duties to Him. In the parable of the Sower, the soil encumbered with foreign matter is representative of the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. It isn't unlikely that this condition, and the attitude it nurtures, has been responsible for more defections and apostasy than all others combined. Little by little do members of God's family allow their family obligations, their social and community interests to detract from their interest, time and devotion to spiritual matters.

There are not any inherent qualities in the secular sphere to undergird and render secure the moral purity of a person, and for this reason it is explainable why, in being weaned away from the church many Christians degenerate morally. Morality existed before religion did, evidently; but morality, once lost can never be regained and protected, sustained and safeguarded without religions. Religion is the support and protection

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of morality. This affords an explanation for the rightful expectation of society to see exemplified in the lives of religionists a higher code of morality than that of the world. The church is either going to influence the world or the world the church; they are placed in opposition to each other, warring against one another, and, therefore, designedly endeavoring to influence the other and thereby subjugate it. The world, of course, is used here with reference, not to the earth, but to the people of the world in contradistinction to those who have been called out of the world and are the church.

The World And Morality

Man was made upright but he sought out many inventions. With his declaration of independence from God, he rapidly degenerated morally. The condition of society, as viewed by God has been exceedingly mad for many centuries. The moral corruption was pronouncedly bad with the coming of Christ and the establishment of the church. The church is composed and constituted of the redeemed and purified from all the moral pollutions of the world. The conflict between the world and the church is a relentless one, in which each is endeavoring to influence and control the lives of the other. The disciples of Christ are the light of the world, and the salt of the earth. The line, therefore, between the two is to be clear, wide and deep; Christians are not to walk as other men walk, but are to put off the old man, or manner of life, being renewed in the spirit of their mind, thus putting on the new man or character (Eph. 4:17-24). The people of God are not justified in lowering their standard of morality in accommodation to the plane of the world. God's standard of morality, as revealed in His Word, is to be our standard. Who is influencing whom today—the church the world, or the world the church?

If there be any doubt in the mind of any reader, but a moments reflection will bear out the idea and confirm the correctness of the assertion that the world is exerting a far greater measure of influence on the children of God, than the reverse. This isn't good. Within the last generation the church has been led into an attitude toward many things quite at variance to that formerly held. For instance, the attitude of Christians toward dancing has been changed to the point of gravely effecting the policy of the church in relation to the teaching of God's Word on the subject. Preachers have been known to be fired because of their public statements condemnatory of this evil. Elders sometimes are known to allow their children to engage in the modern dance, and are, therefore adverse to any teaching against it from the pulpit or in the class room. Mixed bathing is indulged in by members of the church, and the wearing of shorts is widely practiced by women and girls who profess to be followers of the Lord. It is obvious that the church cannot be the light of the world by thus conforming to the world. If these things were ever wrong, essentially speaking, they are still wrong. True, a thing may not be essentially wrong and yet under certain circumstances become wrong. But we are talking of those things which were esteemed as immodest and immoral in their own proper character, and today have become accepted and practiced by members of the church. The question is: have they ceased to be wrong, or have Christians come to think they are so little wrong as to not endanger their standing before God? The apology that "everybody is doing it" is too asinine and treacherous for any sensible person to subscribe to.

The increasing prevalence of divorces and remarriages, without scriptural jurisdiction, by many members of the church is cause for alarm. Why this let-down in respect for the scriptures? It is because the world has demonstrated to make a

and adherence to the morality of marriage, that the church thinks it must go along with the world in order to remain in the world. People of multiple marriages are accepted in full fellowship without any questioning of their status before God, and it isn't entirely unknown for some preachers of the gospel to be accepted, used and honored who have fouled up their lives by questionable marital alliances.

These conditions shall never be relieved and the morality of God's people shall never be recovered by ignoring these facts and therefore refusing to deal with the teaching of Holy Writ as touching such matters. Of course, it is doubtful that the latter will be too successful in reversing the moral trend of the times, for the reformation of the church morally or spiritually has never been completely effected.

The capital fallacy in our thinking as touching these and other matters is the inclination to conform in an effort to be accepted by society to have a feeling of belonging, and to secure a degree of worldly success. Paul tells us to not be conformed to the world but to rather be transformed, and tells us how to do it, and why we should do it. It is possible only by the renewing of minds, by setting our affections on things above and not on things of the earth. This we are enabled to do only in the pervading persuasion and full conviction that we are dead and our life is hid with God in Christ, coupled with the assurance of hope that when He appears we shall appear in glory with Him. This same persuasion, faith and hope will also safeguard and protect us against the wisdom of this world as touching spiritual truth.

The World And Spirituality

Not only is the world, the aspirations, pursuits and pleasures of this world, injuriously effecting the morality of God's people, but equally true is it undermining our spiritual values and our respect for the authority of the Christ as it

is to direct and control our religious faith and practice. Is the church today being influenced by the thoughts of the religious world more than a "thus saith the Lord" in our work and worship? I verily believe it is. The reverse should always be true. There is nothing which we may do in accomplishing the will of God that can be justified on the basis that others are doing it. We are wholly and solely dependent on what the New Testament teaches. Even in the area of matters determined as expedient and decided by uninspired judgment, there is no dependency to be placed in the wisdom of the world. Too frequently men are recognized as leaders in Israel because they have attained positions of leadership in the affairs of men. An entirely different kind of wisdom characterizes these two areas of thought and activity.

The fact that a man has been successful in the business, social or political world affords no reason for his usefulness in the church. Certainly one may be successful in these spheres and still be worthy and capable in the church, but such isn't a guaranty of their ability. The admonition with respect to those who can and should endeavor the recovery of the fallen Christian are those who are spiritual, not those who are prominent in the affairs of the world.

The desire of Israel of old to be like the nations around them prompted the demand for a king. They lost sight of their distinct separateness and their peculiarity as God's people, and hence their avidity to be like others. When the early church was being assaulted and persecuted by the Jews there arose a clamor within the church to incorporate the rite of circumcision into the economy of Christ. Paul clearly states the motive back of this demand. "As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ" (Gal. 6:12).

In the preceding chapter Paul says: "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you. For, brethren, ye have been called to liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (vs. 11-13). From these statements we make this observation: (1) The pressure of the world (Jewish) was being exerted from without on those within the church, and was having the desired effect on some (2) This effect was being expressed in a contention for circumcision to be fastened on the church. (3) The aim was, not that of pleasing God, but to please men, so that the persecution might cease, and acceptability in the general religious community be gained. Who was influencing whom here? The world was influencing the church, and Paul was withstanding this pressure. Was circumcision wrong, inherently so? Paul affirms that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; hence, many may say since it isn't wrong within itself, and would make us more acceptable before the world we should embrace the practice. The lesson is a vital one. We can not afford to be governed by the wisdom of the world, but only by the will of God in our spiritual life. Every innovation, as the terms suggests, comes from without, and the without is the world. Let us look to God to guide, direct, control, preserve and ultimately save us.

Worldliness In The Church, was taken from The Preceptor Magazine (Vol. 5, August 1956, #10). Over fifty one years have passed since the article was first written. And according to my estimation, things haven't improved. I commend the article to you with the hope that all who read it may take heed to the admonitions contained therein. (J.A.B.)

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