

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE CULTURE

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Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you (2 Corinthians 6:17).

These words give the Christian insight into God's will for our lives. We are called to live a life that is separate from sin. I call your attention to the fact that the Lord makes this a command and not an option. Why does the Lord put such a premium on a separated life? This scripture speaks to the necessity to live separate from the entrapments of the world.

This edition of *Beyond* magazine is dedicated to the study of the contrast between the Christian and the culture. What does the Lord require of us and how are we to live in a world that does not embrace Christian principles? Let's start with the Lord's call to holiness.

In the book of Leviticus, we are commanded to be holy. This is another command that the Lord has placed upon our lives.

Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 20:7).

This command comes at a time when the people of God were about to enter their new land and it was vital that their lives reflect the holiness of God.

Can you imagine the other nations around the people of God trying to figure out why these people were different? Think about this, the Israelites were God's people and they were being placed in the position of representing the Lord in a strange land. After many years of bondage in Egypt, it was conceivable that many of the practices of the Egyptians were embedded in the minds of the Israelites. Their lives were affected by the Egyptians and would undoubtedly be reflected in the Israelites behavior.

When God delivered His people from Egypt, He wanted them to live differently. This has always been a passion of the Lord. We must never forget His desire for us to live above sin!

Well, we all know what happened to the children of Israel. They fell into the grip of the very culture that the Lord wanted them to avoid. Sin has the unique ability to grab its victims and persuade them to do what their flesh desires. The result of conforming to the culture was demonstrated in their behavior in many books of the Old Testament. We will not go into all of the references at this time; however, the Word of God documents the change in the hearts of God's people as they became one with the culture. Why did the

people change so much as they entered the new lands? What was the pull on them and their hearts as they strayed away from the Lord and His goodness? I believe it was because they were ignorant of the culture.

This brings us to a very important question. How does the Christian live in today's culture? In light of the many pleasures and trappings of today, how do we stay above it all?

I am convinced that the ability to live above sin is directly linked to the relationship we share with God. Through Jesus, we are able to rise above the trappings of the culture and enjoy true Christian liberties. I know that many of you think that as Christians we live boring, dull lives. That is part of the reason I believe we seek entertainment and amusement through the world. This is simply not true. The life of the child of God is joyful and just plain fun. We walk in the Spirit and we enjoy the presence of Jesus. I just enjoy the life of God, and I know that those who live in Christ know what I am talking about. However, we must be careful that we do not become caught up in the culture of this world and miss the joy of living in God's presence.

Let us begin by evaluating the culture we live in. Our country thrives on pleasure. As a result, we look for the things that bring us pleasure in our every day lives. Now I know that many of you are thinking that we as Christians should be able to enjoy life.

Yet, I believe that we are abandoning our biblical values in order to "enjoy" this life. The world is designed to grant pleasure and ease of life. We, as Christians, are to remain focused on our primary mission. You may ask, what is our primary mission? Well, I believe that our mission and purpose is found in the Word of God. The apostle Peter tells the children of God about their true purpose:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

We have been sent to reveal the true and living God. I am convinced that the only way the world will see the Lord Jesus is through His saints. Jesus tells us our purpose in a more concise phrase:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).

As the children of light, we are given an awesome task. We are chosen by Jesus to

demonstrate the character of God in this dark world. This is a very exciting position to be in today. We are called upon by the Lord to be examples of God's grace, power, and light. The inhabitants of the world are to see Jesus in us! Hallelujah! We have a unique opportunity to share Jesus with a darkened world.

Now, I am sure that you can see why the Lord calls us to separation. How can we reveal Christ to a sinful world if we are not separated from the lifestyle of the world? One of the most challenging comments from the Lord is contained in the book of Ezekiel. God challenges His leaders to teach His children how to live lives that are clearly different from the rest of the world.

Neither shall any priest drink wine, when they enter into the inner court. Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her that is put away: but they shall take maidens of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow that had a priest before. And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean (Ezekiel 44:21-23).

Why does the Lord place such a high value on living separate from the world? I believe that it is due to the nature of God's holiness and His character. We must remember just who it is that we are representing at all times. We are called to be separate from the world and its system and to remain pure.

CULTURAL DRIVING FORCE

You may be wondering just what drives our culture. Is it devils? Is it the hideous things of satanic desires? No, my friends, it is something a little simpler than that.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

The Apostle John tells us that the three things that our culture is made up of are:

- The lust of the flesh
- The lust of the eyes
- The pride of life

These things were prominent in the time of Apostle John, and they are just as real today. Let's look at each of these trappings and discover how they work within the culture.

THE LUST OF THE FLESH

We have been told that the lust of the flesh speaks about sexual desires. Yet, I am convinced that this verse is speaking about the greatest lust of our flesh - the need to run our own life. Think about it, we spend most of our youth trying to get away from our parents authority and those who have rule over us. When we became older, we rejoiced because we could do whatever we wanted (or so we thought).

Let me share a situation in my own life. When I was a child my mother “made” me eat beets. I hated beets and I did everything in my power to avoid eating them. I had an old fashioned mother and father; they made sure I understood where the real power was in our home. Needless to say, I ate my beets, under protest of course. I said to myself, when I get my own family and home I would not eat beets. Well, I did not buy nor eat beets. I thought, “I finally showed my parents and I won”. I had the last laugh, so I thought.

One day while I was in prayer, I had a leading from the Lord regarding, you guessed it, beets. The Lord told me that by not eating beets I was demonstrating rebellion towards my parents. It was the lust of my flesh, trying to do what it wanted. That was an eye opener for me. I thought about it for a moment and discovered the Lord was right. I repented and ate some beets. Well, who would have guessed that I would enjoy them so much. Before my mother went home to be with the Lord, I shared this new knowledge with her. She laughed and told me that she always knew what was best for me.

I never understood what the lust of the flesh was until my experience with the beets. My flesh was trying to get what it wanted and I participated. Our culture directs most of its pleasure to the lust of the flesh. What is the thing you desire the most? That is something to consider today. What do you find yourself trying to control in your world? I have to ask you this, what are the “beets” in your life?

The flesh is a spoiled baby that wants its way all of the time and we must learn to tell it that it will not have its way. That is why the apostle Paul commands the following:

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:11).

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God (Romans 6:13).

Paul saw the flesh as something that needed to be controlled and kept in its place. This is possible with Jesus ruling in our lives. Praise the Lord! As we yield to the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, we will have constant victory over the desires of the flesh. We can

literally submit to the Lord at all times and watch Him move in our lives to bring us into the true peace that comes from surrendering to Him daily. You do not have to yield to the flesh.

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith (I John 5:4).

That is right; we overcome the world and all of its fleshly entrapments. Hallelujah! We can live above the flesh and walk in the Spirit. Remember what the Apostle Paul tells the Christians of Galatia, *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16).*

I strongly counsel you to submit to the Lordship of Jesus in your life and yield to the Spirit of God. Then you will experience the true joy of living in the Spirit and not conforming to the flesh!

THE LUST OF THE EYES

In the popular movie *The Silence of the Lambs*, Anthony Hopkins' character tells Jodie Foster's character that we covet what we see everyday. The truth of that statement is what the lust of the eyes is all about, covetousness. As our eyes roam around, we see so much that we desire. If we are not careful, we will begin to lust after the things we see and then we sin. If we look long enough, we can develop envy and jealousy which can lead to a murderous spirit.

I am concerned that we must keep our eyes focused on the things of the Lord rather than Satan's lies. Our greatest struggle is linked to our eye gate. As a result, we need to discipline our eyes to stay focused on the Lord.

The lust of the eye can become a tremendous problem for us; we need to understand how to keep the victory Christ gave to us in Him. The lust of the eye is perhaps one of the most dangerous challenges we encounter because it is subtle. We look at a fine home or a luxury car and we begin to daydream about owning them. If we are not careful, we can create a serious problem for ourselves.

Notice what can happen when you allow your eyes to get the best of you.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Genesis 3:6).

The woman looked at the tree, desiring the fruit. This is what ultimately led her to sin. By looking at the tree, she gave Satan the opening he needed to tempt her. Let's just speculate

for a moment. Let's just say that if Eve had been looking at the birds, the flowers or the animals that the Lord created, maybe, just maybe she could have avoided sin. We often spend our time looking at the wrong things. Sometimes our eyes will bring us into sin and cost us the beauty of God's plan. When you look at things you should not, the enemy will bring temptation and cause you to fall.

Let's look at another verse.

But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:28 KJV).

Jesus tells us that we should not even allow our eyes to carry us into sinful thoughts. Jesus says that if we look at a woman lustfully, we have committed adultery with her in our hearts. This sin starts with the eyes and ends with the soul. Be careful of what your eyes gaze upon and what you long for; it can cause serious harm.

What about you? How many times have you found yourself doing things that you regretted simply because you were looking at the wrong things? If we are able to discipline our eyes then we will see victory at all times. We must keep our eyes on Jesus and always look to Him for help. Your eyes can also be used to see the glory of God and the wonderful blessings He has given to us.

Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth (Isaiah 40:26 KJV).

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished (Isaiah 51:6 KJV).

We can look at the things that the Lord has done in the earth and then bring Him glory and honor. Hallelujah to the Lamb! God has done some great things and we should look at those things. We should not use our eyes to lust after the things of the culture, but we should look at the things the Lord has done. When the evil one brings doubt, fear and unbelief into our minds, and tries to get us to "see" the way of defeat, we have only to look at the things the Lord has done for us.

Let's use our eyes to look at the things that have been given by the Lord of Hosts. The Lord has done many wonderful things and we should keep our eyes on the things that glorify the Lord.