

**INTRODUCTION:** With all that is going on in our culture today, one question I have heard over and over again amid both our multi-denominational and non-denominational churches is, “What should a Normative Christian Experience be all about?” The question obviously involves how are we supposed to act, what should we do, and what is right and what is wrong in a rapidly changing world? This of course leads into a secondary question, “What is Christian Counter-Culturalism supposed to look like?” Which involves how are the Church and Christ followers supposed to be “IN the world” but not “OF the world?” In our ever-changing world environment, what is God asking us to be and to do? It stands to reason that if God is the same always and forever, His dynamics are anchored in a fixed truth of His own making. Christianity has always avowed that humanity must come to God on His terms. While God makes His appeal in new ways in each new era, the underlying fabric of truth has always been understood to remain constant because it is anchored in a Perfect and Unchanging God.

As we prepare to close out 2018 in America, it is obvious the dominant worldview Christians are now living in has changed dramatically in the past 20-30 years. As a result, many pastors and church leaders are struggling to find and articulate a common ground from which the church and the surrounding culture may dialogue, often neglecting the truth that the Gospel message hasn’t changed nor has the Person and ministry of Christ. While dialogue is critical, its redemptive relevance emerges within the context of an unchanging eternal Truth. The communities we live in are increasingly in need of a fresh view of Gospel Dynamics. The current dominant world view has increasingly become both “Post-Modern” and “Post-Christian.” We need to remember that the Church historically began as a counter-cultural movement within a Roman Pagan, narcissistic, self-indulgent, hedonistic, hostile environment. Thus, living within a hostile environment is nothing new for God’s people. The challenge for the Church to develop and communicate its redemptive relevance and identity in this rapidly changing cultural environment, means we need to return to basic Gospel Centrality. Unfortunately, many church congregations are in denial and are increasingly becoming insular and separatist from the dominant culture in response to this current secular assault. The following articles and resources are intended to be an encouragement to Christians as we find ourselves increasingly marginalized, disparaged and under assault. While there are many things that New Testament Scripture teaches us about, but “Being Separate” from the dominant culture, this never meant not to be engaged with it. Christians can hardly be an influence on those we serve and on those Christ asks us to reach by not having a consistent Christo-centric identity, a thoughtful redemptive message, and a vital mission of ongoing Gospel engagement. We need to remember that our identity as Christ followers needs to be in conformance with the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) and our commitment to the world needs to be in conformance with the Great Commission Matthew 28:18-20), not merely how we’ve always done things.

In this article we will look at a number of teachings and insights from some great Christian pastors, thinkers, and writers on relevant topics about Christian leadership and discipleship to provide us with

greater perspective on some of the more perplexing issues we face today. It is not ever our intention at Authentic Discipleship to tell you what or how to believe, but rather to provide different viewpoints on how we might approach these issues to increase dialogue. Generally speaking, when quoting these different sources, we'll show the original author's thoughts in un-bolded text and AD thoughts in bold text. Hope you are challenged and encouraged by this thought development.

## 1. CONTEMPORARY DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE CHANGE:

- a. **POST MODERNISM** – From Wikipedia the Online Encyclopedia defines Post Modernism as, Generally defined by an attitude of skepticism, irony, or rejection toward the meta-narratives and ideologies of modernism, often calling into question various assumptions of Enlightenment rationality. Consequently, common targets of postmodern critique include universalist notions of objective views of: 1) reality, 2) morality, 3) truth, 4) human nature, 5) reason, 6) language, and 7) social progress. Postmodern thinkers frequently call attention to either the contingent or socially-conditioned nature of knowledge claims and value systems... situating them as products of particular political, historical, or cultural discourses and hierarchies. Accordingly, postmodern thought is broadly characterized by tendencies to self-referentiality, epistemological and moral relativism, pluralism, subjectivism, and irreverence.
  - i. **For those of us that grew up in an era where both truth and reality were objective rather than subjective, this seems a quantum shift toward chaos. "Reason" and "objectivity" no longer rule the day having been replaced by "how I feel" and "how I see it" at any given moment. This results in a changeable and moving view of reality and all its socio-political constructs.**
  - ii. **In a Christian world view, there is a known universal standard that God wove into the fabric of Creation that all of humanity is subject to and judged by. In a post-modern world view, morality and ethics are unhinged from an accepted and known standard, being replaced with situational ethics based upon personal choices in the moment.**
- b. **POST-CHRISTIAN** – From Wikipedia the Online Encyclopedia defines Post Christian as: The loss of the primacy of the Christian worldview in political affairs, especially in the Global North where Christianity had previously flourished, in favor of alternative worldviews such as secularism or nationalism. It includes personal world views, ideologies, religious movements or societies that are no longer rooted in the language and assumptions of Christianity, at least explicitly; although they had previously been in an environment of ubiquitous Christianity (i.e. ever present Christendom). A Post Christian world is one in which Christianity is no longer the dominant civil religion but has gradually assumed values, culture, and worldviews that are not necessarily Christian (and also may not necessarily reflect any world religion's standpoint or may represent a combination of either several religions or none). Post-Christian tends to refer to the loss of Christianity's monopoly or

hegemony within Western Culture, affecting not only its followers, but all those within historically Christian societies as a good and enlightened thing. Post Christian societies refer more to some form of belief in a higher power with fewer pointing explicitly to the Christian God.

- i. **As Evangelical Christians, how do we make ourselves both known and relevant within a world that sees us as increasingly irrelevant? In many ways this is like the Post-Moderns and Post-Christians are speaking in a language that sounds the same but is interpreted in completely different ways.**
  - ii. **In the Modern Christian Era, the choice was either to accept God’s Truth as presented or reject it. Now in the Post-Modern Era, the choice is to reinterpret it in a manner that allows the interpreter to essentially believe whatever they want as “my truth” or “its true for me.”**
  - iii. **A Post-Modern and Post-Christian culture would seemingly be the perfect storm for reinventing faith in completely humanistic terms. In order to counter this radical process, it will be necessary to understand what it means to be truly Christian and articulate it in a manner they can understand, allowing the Spirit to enlighten and convict.**
- c. **COUNTER-CULTURAL – From Wikipedia the Online Encyclopedia defines Counter-Cultural as:** A subculture whose values and norms of behavior differ substantially from those of mainstream society, often in opposition to mainstream cultural mores. A countercultural movement expresses the ethos and aspirations of a specific population during a well-defined era. When oppositional forces reach critical mass, countercultures can trigger dramatic cultural changes. Prominent examples of countercultures in Europe and North America include Romanticism (1790–1840), Bohemianism (1850–1910), the more fragmentary counterculture of the Beat Generation (1944–1964), followed by the globalized counterculture of the 1960s usually associated with the hippie subculture (1964–1974) and the Jesus Movement (1970–1980), followed by the diversified punk subculture of the late 1970s and 1980s.
- i. **Cultures evolve as a result of the ideological, socio-political and technological changes that occur within the culture. In our present culture, change is seen as occurring at a far more accelerated rate than the past, partially due to the rapidity of the technological changes occurring with our cultures. Many sociologists and anthropologists are concerned that the rate of technological change especially in the medical and engineering fields, is out pacing our moral-ethical-ideological rate of change. As in the case of gene manipulation and organ harvesting, the ability to do such things has outpaced our understanding of what should reasonably and humanely be done. The field of artificial intelligence is another example where we don’t really understand the ethics of what we are able to do. Science has become increasingly unbridled to a restraining ethos.**

- ii. Counter-Cultural movements as stated in the above definition, have always created stress within the dominant culture. Thus, it should come as no surprise that change is met with suspicion, resistance, even opposition; particularly when the dominant culture is struggling to come to terms with the magnitude and vicissitudes of the changes.
  - iii. It should be remembered that the radical nature of the Beat Generation, gave way to the Hippie Movement and was followed by the moderating influence of the Jesus movement. While many sociologists tend to think the Hippie Movement had a rather uniform identity demonstrating the self-absorbed excesses of sex, drugs and rock and roll... it was not a uniform movement. Many were truth seekers who were asking hard questions of themselves and of society. These souls were open to the Gospel which sparked the Jesus Movement.
- d. **THE JESUS MOVEMENT – A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP WITH JESUS** – The Goal of Christianity in general and the Jesus Movement in particular is a personal, intimate, friendship with God through Jesus. It is both relational and eternal. The source of the faith rests in the God who reveals Truth, rather than the individual interpreting God's Truth. The following video by Bishop Robert Barron does a great job in explaining this from the Catholic Tradition view of contemporary Christianity. In this video, Bishop Barron explains the primary difference between Christian Mysticism and worldly philosophies throughout history.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2KZDQSxwF4>
- From this video I think it is clear to see that Christianity is not merely a mental discipline. It is for this very reason that Authentic Discipleship combines Spiritual Formation, Biblical Literacy, and Leadership Development into a holistic discipleship experience defined by:
- i. **Spiritual Formation** – Christianity is a personal relationship with God who seeks emotional connection with humanity. It is not merely a mental discipline as the classic philosophies and many religions promote. It is a personal and vital relationship where the individual is being progressively transformed from the inside out. This process called Discipleship involves a moral-ethical value structure as explained in Christian Scripture and was modeled by Jesus. However, Spiritual Formation is built upon Biblical Literacy, a working understanding of the Bible that supports Spiritual Growth.
  - ii. **Biblical Literacy** – Where Spiritual Formation is the EQ [emotional quotient] of Christianity, Biblical Literacy is the IQ [intellectual quotient]. A blend of the relational EQ and the mental discipline of the IQ provide a strong foundation of the Christian faith. Biblical Literacy is understanding what the Bible says, how to interpret it, and how to teach it. It is based on a Biblical theology, meaning the study of God in the Scriptures.
  - iii. **Leadership Development** – Is faith in action... it is finding one's place in the Mission of

**Christ and advancing the Kingdom of God on earth through the indwelling Holy Spirit that is the seal of faith for every Christ follower. Spirit led faith compels us to do God's work on earth, doing the things that matter to God in obedience to the Scriptures.**

- iv. These three components – Spiritual Formation, Biblical Literacy, and Leadership Development is the holistic unity of Christian faith and discipleship.**

**2. ARTICLES AND RESOURCES ON UNDERSTANDING CULTURE CHANGE AND CHRISTIAN COUNTER-CULTURE:**

- a. BE SEPARATE – This is an article by Billy Graham that appeared in the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association monthly publication Decision Magazine of March 2011. “Be Separate” speaks to the need of the Church as a counter-cultural force for the Kingdom of God. This article is a good reminder of the calling of the Church and includes a sober appraisal by Pastor Elton Trueblood as to the lack of Authentic Christian Disciples in our Church today, and of our need to continue to respond to both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. March 1, 2011 – Billy Graham speaking at West Point:**

There is no institution in America quite comparable to West Point. To be a cadet at West Point you must be a citizen of the United States, unmarried, between 17 and 22 years of age and you must conform to the most difficult mental, physical and educational standards. The Christian should stand out like a sparkling diamond against a rough background. He should be more wholesome than anyone else. The cadets are taught discipline, character, dedication and purpose. *These young people have a definite objective and are willing to pay the price of hard work and rigid discipline in order to receive the training.*

I have had the privilege of speaking in the beautiful Gothic Chapel at West Point. As I looked out upon that sea of determined, dedicated young faces—some of the cream of American youth—I could not help but think of the weak, emaciated, milquetoast Christians in the average church who claim to be following Jesus Christ. While the nation sees an increase in crime, immorality, adultery, drunkenness, irreverence, infidelity and open apostasy, millions of professing Christians have forgotten the Word of Scripture that says, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him ... take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Our Lord regarded His followers as a select company that belonged to a different world from other people. He warned the disciples to be loyal to His teachings and principles. He told them that they were to set their affection on things above. He also warned that they would find circumstances exceedingly difficult. Refusing to conform to worldly principles and practices, and living under the lordship of Christ, they would soon become marked men. He told them that the world would hate them. They could not make their light shine by sinking to

## LD 5.13 – Opinion Paper – Christian Counter-Culturalism in a Post Modern-Post Christian World

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the world's low level. It was only by abiding in Christ and living under the ruling power of His Holy Spirit that they could elevate the world. *The power and progress of the Christian church would depend on its unlikeness to the world and its likeness to Jesus Christ.*

The distinction between the lives of those who lived for this world and those who lived for Christ's world was so clear that it made a deep impression on the pagan world of the first century. The early Christians influenced thousands to embrace the Christian faith because they were more loving and more considerate than their neighbors. Christ meant for His followers to be different. *But being merely different was not enough. Christ followers were to be the cleanest, kindest, most unselfish, friendliest, most courteous, most industrious, most thoughtful, truest and most loving people on Earth.*

The world of today is just as pagan in spirit as it was 2,000 years ago. In recent years, the most cultured nations in the world have been guilty of acts of barbarianism that would have shocked even pagan Rome. Millions no longer worship stone idols, but they do worship fleshly idols. They worship and serve the creature more than the Creator. They worship film and television stars, sex, success, wealth and money, but they have little place for God. The television set has become the sanctuary of millions in an atmosphere that is hostile to spiritual growth. *To a large extent, the American church has become merged with the world.* It has adopted so many of the world's ideals and standards that it has lost its ability to stem the tide of crime, deception and immorality that is sweeping the nation. *For millions of church members there is no deep commitment to the cause of Christ, no regularity of attendance at public worship, no sacrificial giving, no personal religious discipline.*

The aim of many churches today seems to be to get names on a list, and the deeper meaning of Christ's call for discipleship is neglected. Therefore, the world has moved into the church. There is apparent success, but in reality there is tragic failure. Quaker theologian Elton Trueblood once said, "Our main mission field today, so far as America is concerned, is within the church membership itself."

Ezekiel's parable of the valley of dry bones pictures Israel as dried up and nearly lost, with no evidence of life. All that remain are the bones, dry and dead. This is true of hundreds of churches today. The organization is going smoothly, but there is little life. The thrilling thing about Ezekiel's story, however, is that new life is possible. The miracle of regeneration can occur: "Breathe on these slain, that they may live" (Ezekiel 37:9). Though Ezekiel was talking about Israel, his parable applies equally well to the church of Christ. The church can be revived. God's interest is not merely in reaching outsiders, important as they are; He is concerned equally with changing the insiders. The call of Christ is for rededication to Him—a call to follow Him, to pattern our lives after His.



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As Christians, of course, we must live in the world. We must infiltrate the world with a purpose to help win the world. But we are not to participate in the evils of the world. There are certain things that a Christian must say no to—in politics, in the shop, in the office. We must show that we are citizens of another world, and many times we may suffer misunderstanding and persecution because of it. We should refuse to support anything that does not meet with the approval of our Christian conscience. *Thousands of professing Christians are betraying their Christian principles because they are more concerned for the world's smile than the commendation of Jesus Christ.*

*I have found that the casual Christian has little influence upon others.* It is only the Christian who refuses to compromise in matters of honesty, integrity and morality that is bearing an effective witness for Christ. Worldly Christians are prepared to do as the world does. They will condone dishonest and unethical practices because they are afraid of the world's displeasure. Only by a life of obedience to the voice of the Spirit, by a daily dying of self, by a full dedication to Christ and constant fellowship with Him, are we enabled to live a godly and influential life in this ungodly world.

Many Christians, however, have misunderstood worldliness. Certain elements of daily life are not sinful in themselves but have a tendency to lead to sin if they are abused. Abuse literally means “overuse” or “extreme use” of lawful things, which then becomes sin. Pleasure is lawful in its use, but unlawful in its overuse. Ambition is an essential part of true character, but it must be fixed on lawful objects and exercised in proper proportion. Our occupation, reading, dress, friendships and other aspects of life are legitimate and necessary, but they can easily become illegitimate, unnecessary and harmful.

Thousands of people engaged in various business enterprises have sold their souls to the devil for an extra dollar. They are willing to cheat, lie and steal in order to make more money. Worldliness is a spirit, an atmosphere, an influence permeating human society, and we need to guard against it constantly and strenuously. The Bible says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15). The Bible also warns that the world and the lust of it shall pass away, but he who does the will of God shall abide forever (Cf. 1 John 2:17). To the Romans, Paul wrote, “Do not be conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2). To the Corinthians, he wrote, “Come out ... and be separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17). James says, “Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4). *These Scriptures clearly teach that the Christian is to be in the world, but not of it; separated from it, yet a witness to it; not molded by it, but manifesting Christ to it; not ensnared in it, but exerting an influence for good over it; not compromising with it, but challenging it; not coming down to its level, but seeking to lift souls up to a higher level.*

There must be an out-and-out stand for Christ. It does not mean that in society we are snobs or have a superiority complex. But the Christian should stand out like a sparkling diamond against a rough background. He should be more wholesome than anyone else. He should be poised, cultured, courteous, gracious, but firm in the things he does or does not do. He should laugh and be radiant, but he should refuse to allow the world to pull him down to its level.

The greatest need today in Christendom is a revival within the church of dedicated, separated, disciplined Christians, living for the Lord Jesus. At West Point, cadets are living separated, dedicated and disciplined lives in order to be officers in the military. They are being trained for future leadership and service. Certainly, we Christians can do no less in order to serve Jesus Christ. The Bible says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).

**Reflection on “Being Separate” – It wasn’t all that long ago that Christian discipleship was both Christo-centric and intentional community developing resulting in a transformative group activity. Christian identity was first and foremost understanding and experiencing God’s profound love in the Person of Jesus and the integrating power of the Holy Spirit. The result was all about pursuing the mission of Christ in advancing the Kingdom of God, rather than pursuing our own individual goals and pleasures detached from Christ and His fellowship with other believers. In the past Sunday School for adults preceded church services and mid-week prayer and small group meetings were the norm. Nowadays, less than 10% of church attendees are involved in any such intentional discipleship activities and you rarely if ever hear encouragement to attend such meetings from the pulpit on Sundays. Those who make such activities a priority are more often than not considered eccentric. Additionally, most Christians see no need to support ministry financially or prayerfully, or to be involved in missional outreach in their community or in the world. Faith has become personal, private and insular.**

I recently read a devotional from the Henri Nouwen Society on life’s passages. People today are so afraid of death, and yet Jesus taught that His followers ought to understand that life is eternal, that we should be looking forward toward our inheritance of an eternal Heavenly Kingdom rather than a temporal earthly one. Not that we should be anxious to leave this world, but there was the understanding that Christians should live as if this present world is not the only life we’ll ever have... something greater and more wonderful awaits us. As such, Christ followers understand that birth, life, and death are not strange bedfellows. Nouwen wrote:



Death is a passage to new life. That sounds very beautiful, but few of us desire to make this passage. It might be helpful to realize that our final passage is preceded by many earlier passages.

When we are born we make a passage from life in the womb to life in the family. When we go to school we make a passage from life in the family to life in the larger community. When we get married we make a passage from a life with many relational options to a life committed to one person. When we retire we make a passage from a life of clearly defined work to a life asking for new creativity and wisdom.

Each of these passages is a death leading to new life. When we live these passages well, we are becoming more prepared for our final passage.

- b. WHO IS THE MOST DANGEROUS PERSON IN YOUR CHURCH – As Culture Change encroaches on our congregations, there are those who may stand out as being potentially problematic because of their interest in accommodating the new cultural direction of our society and moderating the church’s redemptive influence. Conversely there are those who fear on-fire Biblically grounded Christians as an aberration. Jesus taught that there are always going to be sheep and wolves in our communities, and Paul taught that there are both immature and mature Christians. How do we make room for one another while encouraging growth and development of the other... realizing that maturity is the goal for all believers and not merely a few zealots?**

This next article is from “The Gospel Coalition” website – the Gospel Coalition is a group of renown pastors who strive to make “Gospel Centrality” the focus of churches and seminaries. My Theology professor at Western Seminary is a long-time member of the Gospel Coalition. Dr Jeff Louie is a Godly man, extremely bright, and he instilled in me and my classmates a love for Scripture, a love for God, and a love for theology. In this article, the author makes a compelling point related to individuals within the church who cease being open to the authority of the Scripture and the leading of the Spirit in Christian discipleship. Some of these folks in thinking they have it all figured out, remain intractable and focused on their own ideologies. Here is the link to The Gospel Coalition website and this article -

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/who-is-the-most-dangerous-guy-at-your-church/>

“Who is the most dangerous person at your church?” August 5, 2015, by Erik Raymond:

In addition to leading and teaching, pastors are called to protect or guard the flock (Titus 1.5, 9; 2.15; John 21.15-19). Therefore, it logically follows that it is important for pastors to know who is in attendance and membership within the congregation. There are obviously many practical reasons for this, but one is certainly to protect the flock from potential harm.

So I ask you, “Who is the most dangerous guy or gal at your church?” Here I am not so much

aiming at an individual as I am looking at a type of person. Sure, we all can spot the unbeliever who doesn't fluently speak the language of Zion, we can identify the person from doctrinally anemic backgrounds because they keep cutting themselves with the sharp knives in the theology drawer, and of course any Calvinist can sniff out an Arminian within 20 seconds. But I submit that these types of people are not the most dangerous people that attend your church. At least, they are not in my experience. Instead, the most dangerous person at your church is the apparently smart guy who is unteachable.

When I say 'unteachable' I mean that he has it all figured out. He is the classic, "Don't confuse me with the facts, I know what I believe" guy. This is the guy who seems to have a lot of biblical knowledge. He can drop the 30 lb. words and effectively argue his point. Very often he is quite involved and appears to have things together. However, he is dangerous because of the reason you would not think, he is unteachable.

Let me give you some reasons why and how he is dangerous:

- i. ***He is Gospel-Eclipsing:*** The great commission has learning embedded in it (Matthew 28.18-20). This means that being a disciple is one who is always learning. Therefore, to have it all figured out is to deny who you are. As Christians we have to be people who are learning, this includes everyone from pastors to children.
- ii. ***He is Critical:*** If this guy is not being moved by the ministry of the word he is likely gathering bullets to shoot at leaders. He sits quietly during the sermons and teachings only to pick apart everything like a Monday morning quarterback. His unreachability looks the exact opposite of what James 1 teaches: Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1.20-21) (Please note this is not a repudiation of constructive criticism. This is desperately needed. There is a difference between constructive and destructive criticism however.)
- iii. ***He is Divisive:*** This is dangerous for the church in that it invariably brings division (Titus 3.10). This type of boiling pot eventually spills over and when he does he hurts unity and people. In my experience, division in the church usually is a result of somebody being unteachable. This type of thing has a long legacy. Consider how Diotrephes liked to put himself first and stir up division. How did he do this? He did not submit to the teaching of the apostles (3 John vv. 9-10). He was unteachable. This is obviously dangerous for his own soul but also the church. Just like Diotrephes had influence in that congregation so too the unteachable guy no doubt has influence in your local assembly. The influence of an unteachable guy is a vehicle for division.

- iv. ***He is Joy-Robbing:*** A church that is teachable brings its leaders joy. A church or church member who is not robs them of joy. It's that simple ([Hebrews 13.7, 10](#)). I can attest to the fact that this is very true.
- v. ***He is a Time-Waster:*** Let me be careful how I say this. I don't mean that labor in the ministry is a waste of time. But what I do mean is that unteachable guy is one who continues to take up pastoral leadership's time with arguments. He just keeps resetting the same issue over and over again. He can find anything to nitpick and be critical about. So, in this sense he is a waste of time. Or, as Paul might say, the labor is in vain ([Philippians 2.16](#); [2 Thessalonians 3.5](#)).

***So, what do you do with him?***

- i. ***Pray for him:*** Forbid it that pastors become callous and unmoved themselves! The desire is for growth in the Gospel. Therefore, pray ([Colossians 1.9-14](#); [2 Peter 3.18](#)).
- ii. ***Minimize his influence:*** Pastors should always be careful about who is appointed unto leadership. In this case it would obviously make sense not to just put the Bible trivia champ in charge of teaching and leadership items. This is because the Bible trivia champ could also be a spiritual MMA champ on the side.
- iii. ***Watch him and the sheep:*** If this guy is a Christian then he must be cared for too. The pastor must do this while guarding and caring for the flock. This is the type of thing that keeps pastors up at night (see #4 above).
- iv. ***Lovingly aim to teach him:*** Keep on keeping on ([Titus 2.15](#))
- v. ***Confront where necessary:*** When there is sin involved Jesus is clear ([Matthew 18.15-18](#)). This type of thing weighs heavy upon pastors and church members alike. Therefore, even the consideration of such things should cause us to pause, evaluate our own hearts, and pray for receptivity of the word of Christ ([James 1.20ff](#); [Colossians 3.15](#)).

**Final Thoughts – knowing about the Scripture is different than being conformed to it. The Bible is the only standard for faith and practice for every Christ Follower. Church leaders need to remain true to Scripture. Through the Holy Spirit, Scripture works into our hearts and minds, and transforms us progressively over time. We affirm God's Truth by and through the authoritative Word of God, the Bible.**

- c. **ADVICE ON SAME SEX MARRIAGE –** This last article has to do with one of the more perplexing dilemmas for most conservative Christians in an increasingly worldly church culture. I serve in a church plant in the San Francisco Bay area which is the third most hostile environment for Christianity and the Gospel and the fifth most ignorant of and submitted to Scripture. Many within the church expect that church values should be more reflective of those of the post-

**modern culture in which we live. Many believe that leadership within the church should reflect the post-Christian culture in which we live, rather than remaining true to the Biblical standards for Church leadership.**

**This article appeared on the “ChurchLeadersToday” [ChurchLeaders.com] website: “Some Advice on Same-Sex Marriage for U.S. Church Leaders From a Canadian Pastor” By Carey Nieuwhof – July 29, 2018**

In June 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples can marry in all 50 states, setting off a flurry of reaction by Christians and virtually everyone else on social media and beyond. Ed Stetzer wrote a helpful background post to the shift in opinion that led to the decision and included links to a number of other leading articles in his post. The social media reaction ranged from surprising to predictable to disappointing to occasionally refreshing.

I write from the perspective of a pastor of an evangelical church in a country where same sex-marriage has been the law of the land for a decade. That does not mean I hold any uniquely deep wisdom, but it does mean we’ve had a decade to process and pray over the issue. I hope what I offer can help. It’s my perspective. My fingers tremble at the keyboard because my goal is to help in the midst of a dialogue that seems far more divisive than it is uniting or constructive.

There will be many who disagree with me, I’m sure, but I hope it pulls debate away from the “sky is falling/this is the best thing ever” dichotomy that seems to characterize much of the dialogue so far. *The purpose of this post is not to take a position or define matters theologically* (for there is so much debate around that). *Rather, the purpose of this post is to think through how to respond as a church when the law of the land changes as fundamentally as it’s changing on same-sex marriage and many other issues [facing the church today].*

Here are five perspectives I hope are helpful as church leaders of various positions on the subject think and pray through a way forward.

***i. The Church Has Always Been Counter-Cultural:***

Most of us reading this post have been born into a unique season in history in which our culture is moving from a Christian culture to a post-Christian culture before our eyes. Whatever you think about history, theology or exactly when this shift happened, it’s clear for all of us that the world into which we were born no longer exists. Viewpoints that were widely embraced by culture just decades ago are no longer embraced. For some, this seems like progress. For others, it seems like we’re losing something. Regardless, things have changed fundamentally. But is that really such a big deal? For most of the last 2,000 years, the authentic church has been counter-cultural.

The church was certainly counter-cultural in the first century. Even at the height of ‘Christendom’ (whenever that was), the most conservative historians would agree that Christianity as embraced by the state was different than the authentic Christianity we read about in scripture

or that was practiced by many devout followers of Jesus. Being counter-cultural usually helps the church more than hurts it. If you think about it, regardless of your theological position, *all* your views as a Christian are counter-cultural and always will be. If your views are cultural, you're probably not reading the scriptures closely enough. We're at our best when we offer an alternative, not just a reflection of a diluted or hijacked spirituality.

**ii. It's Actually Strange to Ask Non-Christians to Hold Christian Values:**

As the Barna Group has pointed out, a growing number of people in America are best described as post-Christian. The majority of Canadians would certainly qualify as having a post-Christian worldview. The question Christians in a post-Christian culture have to ask themselves is this: *Why would we expect non-Christians to behave like Christians?*

If you believe sex is a gift given by God to be experienced between a man and a woman within marriage, why would you expect people who don't follow Christ to embrace that?

Why would we expect people who don't profess to be Christians to:

- Wait until marriage to have sex?
- Clean up their language?
- Stop smoking weed or drinking?
- Be faithful to one person for life?
- Pass laws like the entire nation was Christian?
- Seriously? Why?

Most people today are not pretending to be Christians. So *why* would they adopt Christian values or morals? Please don't get me wrong. I'm a *pastor*. I completely believe that the Jesus is not only *the* Way, but that *God's way is the best way*. When you follow biblical teachings about how to live life, your life simply goes better. It just does, and I 100-percent agree. I do everything I personally can to align my life with the teachings of scripture, and I'm passionate about helping every follower of Christ do the same. But what's the logic behind judging people who don't follow Jesus for behaving like people who don't follow Jesus? Why would you hold the world to the same standard you hold the church?

First, non-Christians usually act more consistently with their value system than you do. It's difficult for a non-Christian to be a hypocrite because they tend to live out what they believe. Chances are they are better at living out their values than you or I are. Jesus never blamed pagans for acting like pagans. But he did speak out against religious people for acting hypocritically. Think about that.

**iii. You've Been Dealing With Sex Outside of Traditional Marriage for a LONG Time, If you believe gay sex is sinful, it's really no morally different than straight sex outside of marriage:**

Be honest, pretty much every unmarried person in your church is having sex (yes, even the Christians). I know you want to believe that's not true (trust me, *I* want to believe that's not true), but why don't you ask around? You'll discover that only a few really surrender their sexuality. Not to mention the married folks that struggle with porn, lust and a long list of other dysfunctions. If you believe gay marriage is not God's design, you're really dealing with the *same* issue you've been dealing with all along—sex outside of its God-given context. You don't need to treat it any differently.

By the way, if you don't deal with straight sex outside of marriage, don't start being inconsistent and speak out against gay sex. And you may want to start dealing with gluttony and gossip and greed while you're at it. (I wrote more here about how to get the hypocrisy out of our sex talk in church.) At least be consistent...humbly address *all* forms of sex outside of marriage.

The dialogue *is* possible. (Andy Stanley offers a great rationale for sex staying inside marriage here.) We have that dialogue *all the time* at our church. And people are grateful for it. We also talk about our greed, our gluttony, our jealousy and our hypocrisy as Christians. It's amazing. Jesus brings healing to all these areas of life, including our sex lives.

**iv. The Early Church Never Looked to the Government for Guidance:**

Having a government that doesn't embrace the church's values line for line actually puts Christians in some great company—the company of the earliest followers of Jesus. Jesus spent about zero time asking the government to change during his ministry. In fact, people asked him to *become* the government, and he replied that his Kingdom is not of this world. The Apostle Paul appeared before government officials regularly. Not once did he ask them to change the laws of the land. He did, however, invite government officials to have Jesus personally change them. Paul constantly suffered at the hands of the authorities, ultimately dying under their power, but like Jesus, didn't look to them for change. Rather than asking the government to *release* him from prison, he wrote letters *from* prison talking about the love of Jesus Christ. Instead of looking to the government for help, Paul and Jesus looked to God.

None of us in the West are suffering nearly as radically as Jesus and Paul suffered at the hands of a government. In fact, in Canada and the U.S., our government protects our freedom to assemble and even disagree with others. Plus, it gives us *tax breaks* for donations. We honestly don't have it that hard. Maybe the future North American church will be more like the early church, rising early, before dawn, to pray, to encourage, to break bread. Maybe we will pool our possessions and see the image of God in women. And love our wives radically and deeply with a protective love that will shock the culture. Maybe we will treat others with self-giving love, and even offer our lives in place of theirs. Maybe we'll be willing to lose our jobs, our homes, our families and even our lives because we follow Jesus. That might just touch off a revolution like it

did two millennia ago. Perhaps the government might even take notice, amazed by the love that radical Jesus followers display.

***v. Our Judgment of LGBT People Is Destroying Any Potential Relationship with them:***

Even the first 72 hours of social media reaction has driven a deeper wedge between Christian leaders and the LGBT community Jesus loves (yes, Jesus died for the world because he loves it). He died for sinners because he loved them. Judgment is a terrible evangelism strategy. People don't line up to be judged. If you want to keep being ineffective at reaching unchurched people, keep judging them. Judging outsiders is un-Christian. Paul told us to stop judging people outside the church. Jesus said God will judge us by the same standard with which we judge others. Paul also reminds us to drop the uppity attitude; that none of us were saved by the good we did but by grace.

Take a deep breath. You were saved by *grace*. Your sins are simply different than many others. And honestly, in many respects, they are the same. People don't line up to be judged. But they might line up to be loved. So, love people. Especially the people with whom you disagree. Those are a few of the things I've learned and I'm struggling with. The dialogue is not easy when culture is changing and people who sincerely love Jesus sincerely disagree. I think there's more hope than there is despair for the future. The radical ethic of grace and truth found in Jesus is more desperately needed in our world today than ever before.

Is the path crystal clear? No. But rather than being a setback, perhaps this can move the church yet another step closer to realizing its true mission. I was tempted to close comments off on this post, but I will leave them open just to see if we can continue the discussion constructively and humbly. Rants and abusive viewpoints (on either side) will be deleted.

Show grace. Respect those with whom you disagree. If you want to leave a comment that helps, please do so. But please spend at least as much time praying for the situation and for people you know who have been hurt by this dialogue as you do commenting on this post, on others like it or on your social media channels. Maybe spend more time praying, actually. That's what we all really need. And that's what will move the mission of the church forward.

- d. **FRANCIS CHAN ON SEXUAL SIN** – The following video is a great reminder of Kingdom mindedness and Christian identity in a winsome counter-cultural manner:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJ82wVfO5qs>

- e. **"LIVING OUT" WEBSITE** – This is a website written by and for those who have same-sex attractions, seeking to live under Biblical standards of sexuality:

<http://www.livingout.org/the-bible-and-ssa>



- f. **WAR OF THE WORLDVIEWS** – In the July-August 2018 edition of Decision Magazine, Bob Paulson writes in his article titled “War of the Worldviews”, that “A worldview, often described as the lens through which we view the world, affects all we think, do and say, whether we are conscious of it or not. And today in the West, the Christian worldview seems to be losing influence almost daily. Little by little, a rebellious world has chopped away at the once prominent Christian worldview. He goes on to quote Ravi Zacharias, “The Judeo-Christian worldview has become the pariah stepchild of worldviews and is being attacked, while other worldviews are respected, revered and recognized as part of history and the culture of other nations.” Franklin Graham goes on to write in his article titled “The Lens of Scripture” where he makes the following points:
- i. A worldview is the way a person views the world and themselves. It is the lens through which an individual sees issues and relationships, and it becomes the foundation and framework for all decision making.
  - ii. [The well-publicized] Recent tragic shootings are a “cultural problem,” and to understand their “root causes” [we must realize] that we can’t celebrate death in video games, celebrate death in TV shows, celebrate death in movies, celebrate death in musical lyrics, and then remove any sense of morality and of a higher authority expecting that things like this are not going to happen. [As a result of our moral-ethical indifference] our culture is crumbling from within.
  - iii. An individual with a Biblical worldview looks at the world and sifts all information through the lens of God’s Word. Scripture informs [a person’s] thinking and behavior, guiding their intellect and ethical-moral determinations. The Bible is the bedrock that undergirds their entire life.
  - iv. The secular worldview dismisses God as irrelevant in the affairs of men and government, and views critical moral [and ethical] issues as independent of God’s moral-ethical Character and principles. [Without this Biblical Worldview] Clear definitions of right and wrong are impossible to determine, having been replaced by cultural whims and situational ethics.
  - v. Over and against every competing worldview, the Bible forcefully declares, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2). In other words, the only way to see all of life accurately is through the transforming lens of Biblical Scripture.
  - vi. This is the only worldview that sees clearly, rightly and rejoices the heart for eternity [through the lens of Scripture and with the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit].

**CONCLUSION:** Grace is compelling, but it isn't easy. Grace is not easy to give, and it's not always easy to receive. Grace asks something of you... to be open and willing to change and understand that at any particular time our openness to and tolerance of change will vary. The Christian experience is far more than "receiving Jesus as Savior." We should understand that this is just the beginning toward making Jesus "Lord of our lives." Knowing, loving, and obeying Jesus is what Christian discipleship entails. Transformative discipleship is the Spirit's goal for all Christ followers as we are being progressively transformed into Jesus' likeness in displaying His character and values. Grace is all about knowing, loving and spending eternity with God, not merely avoiding hell. As Christians, we should want to welcome opportunities to interact with those with whom we disagree. We should want to have a dialogue even about the difficult stuff. There well maybe some things we cannot affirm, but even then we can welcome and engage the individual and point them toward Jesus who is the author of life. We also owe it to our Lord to do the work of personally growing in discipleship. Jesus, and the Apostles loved the Scriptures, and studied them diligently. Can we do any different? We should know the Scriptures, and we should encourage serious study and discipleship in our congregations. We should have the Scriptures inform and moderate our theology. We should be able to present a solid Biblical defense of our faith and defend our theological positions from the Scriptures, not merely state our own preferences. We don't have to agree on everything, just the main thing – Jesus is Savior *and* Lord, and we choose to serve Him *and the* Church He loves. Culture is dynamic and not static, it is going to continue to change and morph. God's Truth is dynamic as well, being made relevant in each generation. As Christians, we should do the hard work of discipleship... learning from and being transformed by the Scriptures we study under the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit that Jesus said would lead us into Truth. Professor Robert Mulholland said it best in his book Shaped by the Word, that *The purpose of studying Scripture is not to master it but to be mastered by it.*

For more on understanding the purpose of the study of Scripture, see this article on the AD website:

<http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Interpreting%20Scripture%20-%20Part%201.pdf>