

IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

Peter on Pentecost encouraged that multitude of Jews to become Christians with these words: "Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40). Christians live in a world that is hostile to Christ and those who follow Him. Our reaction to that world can be one of three actions. Let us examine these responses and examine ourselves.

One reaction to the world found among those who claim to be Christians is isolation. Over the centuries, some efforts to do this have resulted in literal, physical isolation from the world. People have actually withdrawn themselves from the world to some isolated place that they might not have to confront the sinfulness of the world.

Others have attempted to isolate themselves by ignoring the real world. They cancel their newspaper subscriptions and refuse to listen to the news for fear of being aware of the problems of the real world. They live in their own dream world without coming to grips with the way sin has affected others.

We should realize that Christians cannot respond to the world in such ways. Jesus' prayer shows the error of His followers when they try to withdraw from the world. He prayed:

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth (John 17:15-17).

Christians must remain in the world, but not be of the world. Christians must have contact with those in the world (Mat. 28:19) and help them deal with their burdens of sin (Gal. 6:2, 10), but Christians must abstain from the sins of the world (1 The. 5:21-22). If Christians are to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Mat. 5:13-16), they must be in the world and make contact with that world.

A second mistake that Christians make is to become like the world. This course is the easiest one to take—just give up and give in. There are members of the church who do not want to be distinctive, to be different. Their lives after baptism are no different from the way they lived before. They have the same companions, their language is the same, they go the same places, and they enjoy the same forms of entertainment that they did before they became "Christians." These "unconverted Christians" live just as those who are in the world live. For them it is too difficult to change; it is too much to ask of them. Their concept of being Christians is certainly not what is taught in the Scriptures.

Change in the behavior of those who became Christians was noted in the New Testament by their former companions: "Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (1 Pet. 4:4). Paul described the sinfulness of the Corinthians before they became Christians in 1 Corinthians 6:8-11. However, it is highly significant that he said that these sins were in their past, not their present. His words were, "And such were some of you" (6:11). Repentance requires a change of mind, which brings about a change in behavior. A person who is no different in behavior after baptism has neither repented nor been converted. He may have his name on some church roll, but he is not a Christian.

The true Christian does not love the world, "neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15). Christians realize that the love of the world causes one to be an enemy of God (Jam. 4:4). Paul wrote, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed" (Rom. 12:2). Pure religion involves keeping oneself "unspotted from the world" (Jam. 1:27). Paul's admonition is appropriate here: "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 Cor. 6:17).

—Lester Kamp
Denver, CO