

Living Distinctively Christian Lives

To say something is “distinctive” is to say that it has characteristics which separate it from other things. Two opposing football teams can be recognized by the distinctiveness of their uniforms. When two boxers are introduced, the announcer may say “and now in the black trunks from Paterson New Jersey,” and the other man may be introduced as one who's wearing the white trunks.

Schools may be distinctively different as to the courses of study they offer, and two candidates may have distinctively different views on major issues. Whatever the case, opposing sides usually have certain distinctives that sets them apart.

Why should we think it would be any different in spiritual matters? The Bible teaches that there is a raging war going on between two kingdoms. The first kingdom is the kingdom of this world led by Satan who is called the “prince of this world.” In order to lead people astray, Satan has developed a system of living that is different than the way God has commanded us to live. The Bible calls that system of living the “world.” The other kingdom is the kingdom of God.

Rather than blending in with the unsaved world around us, God wants us, who belong to Him, to be distinctively different.

Leviticus 10:10, “You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean....”

WHAT THE DEVIL DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT WORLDLINESS

1. YOU CAN BE “SQUEEKY” CLEAN ON THE OUTSIDE AND STILL LIVE A WORLDLY LIFE

Often times when we think of worldliness, we think of something outward. For example, some people think it is worldly to play pool or cards. Some of the Amish people believe buttons and zippers are worldly. Some Pentecostal groups used to believe that lipstick is the Devil's grease. Some people believe it is a worldly thing to go to the movies etc.

In The Grace Awakening, Charles Swindoll told of a missionary family who literally were forced off the mission field over peanut butter. They were sent to a location where peanut butter was not available, so they asked friends back in the States to occasionally send them some. The problem was that the other missionaries considered it a mark of spirituality not to have peanut butter. The newer missionary family considered this a

matter of differing opinions, so they continued to receive and enjoy their peanut butter. But the pressure from the other missionaries to conform became so intense, the newer family finally gave up and left the mission field. Spirituality is not based on whether or not you eat peanut butter.

Jesus faced a similar situation in His day. The religious leaders, the Pharisees made up all kinds of religious rules. One such rule concerned a ceremonial ritual of how someone was to wash his hands before eating. The hand washing had nothing to do with cleanliness. It had to do with a ceremonial ritual. When someone didn't wash their hands according to their rules, they were "bent out of shape."

Jesus answered the issue in

Matthew 15:16-20, "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

Jesus said the peanut butter is not the problem. It is the evil going on in the heart that is the problem. The wrong happening on the outside is only a symptom of the evil within. If you want to know if you are living a worldly life or a godly life, start with the inside. What do you see there? What are your attitudes like?

2. WORLDLINESS KEEPS ME FROM BEING CLOSE TO GOD

James 4:4, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."

1 John 2:15-17, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."

Love for God is like a bucket of hot water. Worldliness, on the other hand, is like a bucket of cold water. When you pour the bucket of worldliness into the bucket of love for God, what happens? The bucket of love for God begins to cool down. In other words, to the extent that you love and live by the philosophies of this world, to that extent you do not love God. Love for God and love for the world are mutually exclusive.

When Paul was in Rome and in prison the first time, he wrote several books. He mentioned that one of the men helping him there was Demas.

In the last chapter of 2 Timothy there is one tragic sentence:

"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world."

Demas went over to the side of the enemy. What happened to Demas and others like him? They were infected by the world, and the more they loved the world, the less they loved God.

3. WORLDLINESS KEEPS ME FROM KNOWING GOD'S WILL

God's will has been defined as "what you would choose if you had all the facts." It is the very best choice possible for your life.

Romans 12:1-2, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

God has a plan for your life. You are not an accident. You are here on purpose, and the key to life is finding that purpose and living it out. It is impossible, however, to know God's perspective while you're living according to the world's perspective because the two are exactly opposite. The first thing any of us need to do in understanding God's will for lives is to become a living sacrifice to God. And when our thoughts are lined up with his thoughts, knowing God's will is a natural thing.

4. WORLDLINESS KEEPS ME FROM LIVING A FULL LIFE

The worldly perspective on life tells us that fulfillment comes from external things. We are told that if you use the right deodorant and the right shampoo, if you wear the right jeans, that life will be glorious. That's not true.

If they are the focus of your life, the things of this world will rob you of fulfillment. They leave you wanting more. Ecclesiastes 1:8 says it this way:

"All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing."

The more a person gets of that which he craves, the more he wants. Charles Colson described what his life was like before he met Christ. "I had arrived at everything I had ever dreamed about as a kid. I was 41 years old, had a healthy six-figure law practice,

clients waiting at the door, a yacht in Chesapeake Bay, a limousine and driver, was a friend of the President, and had all kinds of people working for me and others dying to come into my firm. And I never felt more rotten in my life.”

Living a man-centered life has the illusion of happiness and fulfillment, but it is only an illusion.

HOW TO DEFEAT WORLDLINESS

1. I MUST REJECT THE WORLD’S VALUE SYSTEM

A few weeks ago, we spent our Sunday talking about our value systems. A value system is simply what you value. For most, that is fame, fortune or fun. In contrast to that kind of thinking, Jesus said, in Luke 12:15, “a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Man Burns His Possessions to Find Happiness

British style writer Neil Boorman has decided to burn every branded thing in his possession. "I am addicted to brands," he confessed in a magazine article:

From an early age, I have been taught that to be accepted, to be loveable, to be cool, one must have the right stuff. At junior school, I tried to make friends with the popular kids, only to be ridiculed for the lack of stripes on my trainers. Once I had nagged my parents to the point of buying me the shoes, I was duly accepted at school, and I became much happier as a result. As long as my parents continued to buy me the brands, life was more fun. Now, at the age of 31, I still behave according to playground law.

Boorman finally realized that the happiness found in his possessions is hollow and short-lived, leaving him with a "continual, dull ache." So he's taking drastic action and turning to a life of simplicity. He summarizes: The manner in which we spend our money defines who we are. ... In this secular society of ours, where family and church once gave us a sense of belonging, identity, and meaning, there is now Apple, Mercedes, and Coke. ... So, this is why I am burning all my stuff. To find real happiness, to find the real me.

In our world, you have to be continually acquiring more and more in order to get the next high. If you choose God’s value system, you can sit back, relax and be content that you know Him because you know He is all you need.

David knew that. He praised God in 1 Chron 29:11-12 by saying,

“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.”

Whatever you need, God’s got it.

2. I MUST FILL MY MIND WITH GOD’S PERSPECTIVE

One of the problems we face in seeking to be distinctively different is familiarity. We are constantly bombarded with messages that tell us sin is good. It’s fun, and we deserve to have fun. Living in a world that is filled with non-biblical thinking has a way of dulling any spiritual sensitivity that you might have, and that has happened over and over again throughout history. During the days of Samson, the Jews were persecuted by the Philistines, and that was a thorn in their flesh. After time passed, the Israelites begin to intermarry with the Philistines, worship their gods, and the distinction between what is godly and what is ungodly ceased.

When the Jews were taken into Babylonian captivity, they would have been willing to do anything to go back to their homeland. By the time they were finally allowed to go back, many of those Jews living in Babylon chose to stay where they were. They had blended in with the Babylonian world, and once again, the distinction between the godly and the ungodly ceased.

What happened to those people, can happen to us. We can become so much a part of our world that we blend in with it and lose our distinctiveness.

Romans 12:2, “Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

The only way to remain spiritually sensitive is to fill your mind with godly thoughts, the easier it will be to spot ungodly thinking when you are confronted with it.

3. I MUST PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO WHERE I AM SPIRITUALLY

We pay attention to our bank accounts, and we pay attention to our health. And yet, it is common for us to give very little attention to where we are spiritually. And that’s a problem because your spiritual life is never on hold. It is either moving forward or backward, and you can move backward without even knowing it.

"Two young men were fishing above a low dam on a river near their hometown. As they were concentrating on catching fish, they were unaware that they had drifted until they were not far from the water flowing over the dam. When they realized their situation, the current near the dam had become too powerful for them to keep their boat from going over. Below the dam the water was dashing with a strong force over great boulders and through crevices in the rocks. Caught by the swirling waters under the rocks, they never came to the surface. After days of relentless searching, the divers finally found one body, and then, two or three days later, the other."

Hebrews 2:1 *We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.*

Drifting requires no effort. All you have to do is to stop rowing, and you'll begin drifting. Those two young men are dead because they didn't recognize the danger, and they didn't know how far they had drifted. Like so many others, their lives were focused on having a good time. If we want to avoid following their mistake on a spiritual level, we need to have some markers in our lives to tell us which direction we are moving in.

Is it easier to miss church than it used to be? How about alone time with God in Bible study and prayer? How about your attitudes about the circumstances of your life? How about your responses to difficult people in your life? All of these things and many more are markers that will help you to know if you are drifting.

The Christian life is something that is to be examined regularly. If you don't know where you are, you'll probably go where you don't want to go. Be careful about drifting.

4. I MUST DESIRE TO MOVE FORWARD SPIRITUALLY

Tozer, "Every man is as close to God as he wants to be; he is as holy and as full of the Spirit as he wills to be."

Max Lucado draws us a picture of worldliness. Not long ago I boarded a plane. I walked down the aisle, found my seat, and sat down next to a strange sight. The man seated next to me was in a robe and slippers. He was dressed for the living room, not for a journey. His seat was odd, too. Whereas my seat was the cloth type you normally see, his was fine leather.

"Imported," he said, when he noticed I was looking.

"Bought it in Argentina and put it on myself."

Before I could speak he pointed to some inlaid stones in the armrest.

"The rubies I purchased in Africa. They cost me a fortune."

That was only the beginning. His fold-down table was of mahogany. There was a portable TV installed next to the window. A tiny ceiling fan and

globed light hung above us. I had never seen anything like it. My question was the obvious one,

“Why did you spend so much time and expense on an airline seat?”

“I live here,” he explained. “I make my home on the plane.”

“You never get off?”

“Never! How could I deboard and leave such comfort?”

Incredible. The man made a home out of a mode of transportation. He made a residence out of a journey. Hard to believe? You think I’m stretching the truth? Well, maybe I haven’t seen such foolishness in a plane, but I have in life. And so have you. You’ve seen people treat this world like it was a permanent home. It’s not. You’ve seen people pour time and energy into life like it will last forever. It won’t. You’ve seen people so proud of what they have done, that they hope they will never have to leave—they will.

We all will. We are in transit. Someday the plane will stop and the deboarding will begin. Wise are those who are ready when the pilot says to get off.

Before we know it, the plane of life will land for all of us. At that moment, the most important thing in your life is that you will have lived a life that pleased Him. That’s all that will matter.