

# OpenTheo

## Seven Principles for Cultivating a Christian Posture toward the World

May 13, 2022



### **Life and Books and Everything** - Clearly Reformed

Important lessons to learn as we deal with negativity and hostility

In this episode of Life and Books and Everything, Kevin reads from the article he wrote for WORLD Opinions on seven principles for cultivating a Christian posture toward the world.

### **Transcript**

Greetings and salutations. This is Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung.

Today I have my latest article for World. Be sure to check out the World Opinions page for regular articles that I contribute there and a number of other good folks. This one is entitled "Seven Principles for Cultivating a Christian Posture Toward the World." Tim Keller recently tweeted about abortion in politics.

Then James Wood wrote a piece for first things respectfully critiquing Keller's approach to politics and cultural engagement, which prompted David French to defend Keller in critique wood. By now, someone has probably offered an article criticizing them all. Rather than responding to the specific arguments in particular, I'd like to zoom out and ask a broader question.

What should the Christian's posture be to a hostile world? Not surprisingly, the question does not allow for a simple answer. The message and model of the New Testament cannot be reduced to a single attitude or strategy, but there are important lessons to learn. Here, then, are seven principles for cultivating a Christian posture toward our "negative world." Number one, set an example of godliness for the unbeliever.

We should live demonstrably different lives, keeping our conduct honorable so that outsiders might give Christianity a hearing, or at least be put to shame, for slandering us. This means we refuse to repay evil for evil. It also means we bless those who do not

deserve it.

Even those who do good may suffer for righteousness sake. This is point number two, be prepared to suffer. As I'm reading here, I'll just note there's a lot of scripture references and parentheses.

I'm not giving you those parentheses, but you can go find the article and be sure to check out that I'm trying to make scriptural points and often referencing and rephrasing scriptural sentences. Point number two, be prepared to suffer. Even those who do good may suffer for righteousness sake.

We should not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon us. Winsomeness is often a desirable aim, but it is not by itself a sufficient cultural strategy. If the world hates the church, perhaps it's not the church's fault, but the fulfillment of what Jesus promised.

We can care for the poor, love one another, and get our tone right, but still the world will hate those who are not of the world. Number three, build attractive bridges to welcome the curious in. Although the application of first Corinthians 9, 19 through 23, he can be debated, the big idea is clear.

We should be eager to remove barriers to the gospel. Coming to Christ takes a miracle of the Holy Spirit to regenerate the fallen human heart. We should not make the Holy Spirit provide a second miracle to overcome our stupidity.

When someone wants to learn more about our faith, we should respond with gentleness and respect, not with borishness. Number four, build sturdy walls to keep false teachers and false teaching out. So you can see what I'm doing there, build attractive bridges to welcome the curious in, and also build sturdy walls to keep false teaching out.

The same Peter who counseled gentleness when making a defense of the faith also called the sexual liberties of his day, irrational animals, blots and blemishes, and accursed children. The difference in Peter's tone has everything to do with what or whom is trying to get into the church. The faithful minister builds both bridges and walls.

Jesus didn't rebuke the seven churches because they weren't nice enough to the Nicoleotans. He rebuked them for tolerating that woman Jezebel who thought herself a big shot but was leading Christians into sexual immorality and idolatry. Number five, do not think that one's size fits all.

If we are to be wise in our posture toward the world, we must discern whether that creature in the distance is a lost sheep looking for home or a pig ready to trample pearls under its feet. Jesus patiently taught Nicodemus the Pharisee because he came looking for help. While John the Baptist announced the Pharisees as a brood of vipers because they came looking for trouble.

If outsiders only get from a sunshine or thunder, we are probably living out our personalities more than we are trying to discern the sort of person in front of us and what message he needs to hear. Number six, approach cultural and ethical polarities on a case-by-case basis. Some issues that divide Christians are adiaphora, matters left up to our consciences and guided by the goal of mutual edification.

But sometimes there is no middle ground and no third way. When Jesus was asked about divorce, he sided with the more restrictive Shemi school over the Hillell school of interpretation. When asked about the resurrection, Jesus defended the resurrection and agreement with the Pharisees over against the Sadducees.

In one sense, Jesus transcended those debates he was after all calling people to himself. But he didn't act like both sides of the controversy were equally right and equally wrong or that the best answer was some of column A plus some of column B. Number seven, and finally, when people give you a hearing, don't lead with a hard edge and don't leave the hard stuff out. Think of Paul in the book of Acts.

He begins his speech to the men of Athens with commendation and common ground, but he goes on to correct their worship, call them to repent and proclaim the hard to believe resurrection. Likewise, Paul speaks respectfully to Felix, Festus and Agrippa, but he does not avoid the doctrines and ethical demands he knew they would find disagreeable. In this, Paul is a model for us as we face an increasingly hostile world.

Courtesy, wherever possible, clarity at all costs.

[Music]

(dramatic music)