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Toward a Radically Christian Counter - Culture (Part 1)



Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture - Steve Gregg

In "Toward a Radically Christian Counter-Culture," Steve Gregg argues that Christians should strive to create a distinctively Christian society in line with God's calling for the church. He suggests that rather than aligning with political conservatism or liberalism, Christians should become radical followers of Christ and focus not only on reaching heaven but furthering God's kingdom here on earth. This requires creating an alternative society with a different set of values and practices that differ from worldly cultures. Gregg urges Christians to embrace the distinctive characteristics of the Christian lifestyle and become a counter-culture community that embodies and spreads the Kingdom of God.

Transcript

The general theme is Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture. And the word toward is deliberately placed in the title because I don't intend to establish with these teachings or without them a radically Christian counterculture. That is the work for God to do.

But the title suggests that what we're aiming at, the direction we're facing and the thing we should be pursuing is something that is really, I believe, what is God's calling for the church. This is not a new revelation. This is exactly what we read of in the book of Acts.

This is what has characterized the church at its best times in the best parts of the world where this was feasible. There have been many times in church history where Christians were so distinctively Christian that they stood out as a light shining in a dark place and were such a testimony for the kingdom of God and for Christ that when the gospel was preached it had an appeal to those who were acquainted with the body of Christ. And I said last time that we don't see this right now in the place that we're living in the world.

It's a strange thing to me because I'm old enough to remember a time 40 years ago during the so-called Jesus movement that almost any time we spoke of Christ to unbelievers they seemed fascinated, they seemed interested, they seemed hungry and a great number of people of my generation seem to embrace the gospel at least at some level very readily. And yet that's the opposite of what my perception is over the past 30

years or so. And it's amazing to me how much of a change there is.

Back in those days, of course, the dominant culture of my generation, at least where I was living in Southern California, was pretty much the hippie culture which was corrupt. It was a corrupt culture but it was an attempt to question the dominant culture and to seek alternatives. Unfortunately most of the hippies did not seek in the scriptures, did not seek in Christ, and therefore the alternative they found was not really better.

In many ways it was perhaps morally worse than the culture they were protesting but they were looking for something and many of them, becoming disillusioned, found Christ. And that was what we called the Jesus movement. It was around 1969, 70 or so it began.

And if you were in the right place, and it didn't have to be one place because it was happening all over the country and in many other parts of the world, but particularly where I was in Southern California seemed to be where it was the hub, you would find that people who had been hippies were turning to Christ and their lifestyles, because they had been hippies, they had questioned the dominant culture, they didn't just find Christ and jump into the old American style traditional church culture. They thought, well, I've already gotten broken free from that. Now that I'm a Christian I want to look at the scriptures and see what it means to follow Jesus.

And so many of them became radical followers of Jesus. I know this because I knew many of them and I was one of them. And I had been raised in the church, I had not been a hippie, I've never used drugs, never even tried them.

I was not at all from the hippie culture, I was from the Baptist youth group culture and very conservative, and yet in the Jesus movement I realized that there were people out here who had not, like myself, been raised as Christians, but who were living a lot more like I found Jesus teaching to live. Not the hippies, of course, but the Jesus people. That they were somehow unfettered by traditions that I had pretty much used as the paradigm for my vision of Christianity.

And so it made me want to look more carefully at the scriptures and see, you know, how much the Christianity in which I had been raised is really an American or Western or modern adaptation of Christian religious sentiments without really buying into everything Jesus said. And we have come to often in our culture right now, especially now, associate radical Christianity perhaps with political conservatism. And the reason that we perhaps have done this is because conservatism appears to be the only alternative to liberalism, and liberalism seems to be going berserk as far as just departing from, you know, any connection to Christianity.

It seems that we think of the liberal branch of the political spectrum as those who are trying to remove God from schools, trying to remove, you know, God from the public square. And so we think of conservatism as the Christian alternative to liberalism. But

Jesus was anything but conservative.

Jesus was definitely a radical in his day. The conservatives were the Pharisees, and Jesus did not align himself with them. He also did not align himself with the liberals.

Jesus did not come to join a political party or to align himself with one. He came to be his own political party, to be a king. He came to establish an alternative society with him as the Lord, him as the king, the monarch.

And those who found Christ in those days realized they weren't just, you know, aligning themselves with conservative Judaism, although much of what Jesus taught was very agreeable with what the best in what the law had taught. I mean, almost everything Jesus taught could be found in the law of Moses or in the Psalms at least. The best of the old covenant ethics were found in the ethical teachings of Jesus.

There's no question about that. But what Jesus was about was not strictly about ethics, but about Jesus himself, about having a relationship with God, having a relationship with God through an attachment to Jesus Christ. And, of course, his teachings then became the paradigm for living.

And when people really took his teachings, rather than just whatever was conservative or liberal in that society, took his teachings, they were a radical third option. Now, in order to get a running start on tonight's portion, I need to go back and just mention a few things. When we talk about a radically Christian counterculture, of course, perhaps the fundamental word in that phrase is the word culture.

And it is a word that is modified by the other parts of the title. It's culture, but it's counterculture. It's not just counterculture, it's Christian.

And it's not just Christian, it's radically Christian. But culture is the one phenomenon that's been modified by all those other modifiers. What is culture? You see, most Christians believe, it seems to me, at least the Christians I meet, they appear to believe, that the purpose Jesus came to accomplish was to get us all to heaven.

And so the big task of the church is to tell as many people as possible how to get to heaven and persuade them to do the things that will get them into heaven. Now, I don't disagree that getting people to heaven is desirable. I plan to go there.

I plan to take as many people there with me as I can. But I think the focus on heaven in Christianity is not the same focus as in the teaching of Jesus or the Apostles. You'll find essentially nothing in the teaching of Jesus that talks about how to go to heaven.

But we are confused sometimes by the frequent use of the expression in Jesus' teachings, especially in Matthew, or uniquely in Matthew, kingdom of heaven. Jesus made many statements about the kingdom of heaven. And we, when we read it, at least

I, when I was younger and read it, I was not real clear on what was meant by the kingdom of heaven.

The phrase was a bit, you know, I only found it in one place, and that's in the book of Matthew. It's not found in the rest of Scripture. Only Matthew uses the term kingdom of heaven.

But it sounded to me like it meant the kingdom that is heaven. Like if we said the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, what we mean is Saudi Arabia is a kingdom. And when we say the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we mean the kingdom that is called Saudi Arabia.

So when I read the expression, the kingdom of heaven, I just assumed it meant the kingdom that is called heaven. That it's just a statement about heaven, where we go when we die. We're gonna go to heaven.

We're gonna go to the kingdom. And people apparently have felt this way in our culture, because they talk about being blown to kingdom come when someone dies. You know, well, apparently kingdom to them means where you go when you die.

Because if this whole place was annihilated by a nuclear blast, someone would say, well, they were blown to kingdom come. Well, that reflects, I think, a misunderstanding of the expression kingdom of heaven, as Jesus used it. And if he did mean heaven, then Jesus was always talking about going to heaven.

But my contention is that he was not talking about heaven when he talked about the kingdom of heaven. The word of here means from. It's the kingdom that is from heaven.

Jesus said to Pilate in John 18:36, my kingdom is not of, meaning from, this world. Certainly his kingdom was in this world. There's no question about that.

He made that very clear in his teaching. But he said my kingdom is not of this world. It is of heaven.

It is from somewhere else. It's not something that originated from this world. It's of divine origin.

And it is the same expression that in the other Gospels is meant by the term kingdom of God. The kingdom that is of God. Now, there's a possibility that some of you come from a theological background, so there's a difference between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God.

If you had the Scofield reference Bible or follow dispensationalism, you may have been told that the kingdom of heaven is one thing and the kingdom of God is something else. This was a novel idea introduced less than 200 years ago and not very well established by any scriptural authority. The truth of the matter is Christians throughout history have

virtually always known that the term kingdom of heaven is just Matthew's way of referring to what the other Gospels call the kingdom of God.

And this is easily established. All you have to do is turn to parallel passages in Matthew and in Luke or in Matthew and Mark and you'll find that where in Matthew's Gospel or Mark's Gospel, Jesus is recorded as saying the kingdom of God in a particular setting. In Matthew's Gospel, the same setting, same statement.

Instead of kingdom of God, it's kingdom of heaven. And that is simply because Matthew, who's writing for Jews, is observing the Jewish sensitivity. Jews don't like to use the word God very often.

They often would substitute with the word heaven. You may meet Jews today. In fact, you might meet Christians today.

In fact, you might be one of them. I meet Christians all the time like this. They won't write the word God.

They'll write G-D. You ever encounter that? Maybe you do that. Well, why do people do that? I was just asked that recently online.

Someone wrote to me and said, why do people do that? It's because it's a Jewish convention. It's something the Jews did and do. And some Christians have picked it up because modern Christians, at least some sectors of them, are fascinated and enamored with all things Jewish.

So they do it too. But the idea is the Jews are reluctant to speak or write the word God because they associate, of course, with Yahweh. And they are afraid that if they do it too frequently or too lightly, they may become guilty of taking the name of the Lord in vain.

So they just don't use it. And the Jews have always been this way. You know, in the story of the prodigal son, when the young Jewish boy had left his father's home and he ruined his life, when he came to his senses, what did he say? He said, I'm going to go to my father and I'm going to say, Father, I've sinned against heaven and in your sight.

Sinning against heaven means sinning against God. He's a Jew. It's more comfortable for him to say sinned against heaven than sinned against God.

The word God is almost too sacred to use very frequently. So the Jews would say, heaven bless you, when we would say, God bless you. And where the term kingdom of God served well among Gentile audiences, to whom Mark and Luke wrote, the Jewish audience, to whom Matthew wrote, would have been uncomfortable with such frequent references to the kingdom of God.

And so Matthew not always, but sometimes, substitutes the word heaven. But he does so

in such a way that it's very clear he's using it simply interchangeably with kingdom of God. You can see this, for example, in Matthew 19, where in Matthew 19, we find Matthew using both terms, but using them interchangeably.

Matthew 19, 23, and 24, Jesus said to his disciples, assuredly I say to you that it's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, notice I'm going to repeat myself now, I'm going to say the same thing again. Again I say to you, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Now you see, first time he said kingdom of heaven, second time kingdom of God, and he said, I'm just repeating myself here, I'm just going to say it again. He's not saying two different things, he's saying one thing twice. But as a Jew, he can use the word heaven and God interchangeably as a convention of speech.

And so when we read in Matthew of the kingdom of heaven, we're not reading about heaven, we're reading about the kingdom. The same kingdom that is elsewhere called the kingdom of God. But what is that? Well it isn't heaven.

Remember, Jesus said we should pray, your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. God's will is already done in earth.

We're praying for something to happen, I mean in heaven, we're praying for something to happen on earth that resembles what's already going on in heaven. May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is already in heaven. And remember Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things we have to do.

He's not saying seek to do the things that will send you to heaven, he's saying seek that which can be in fact found here, the kingdom of God. Jesus said the kingdom of God had come. First of all, John the Baptist and Jesus both preached the kingdom is at hand, meaning near.

But later, in Luke 17, 20, the Pharisees demanded of Jesus when the kingdom of God would appear. And he said the kingdom of God is not going to come observably. People will not be able to say lo here or lo there, but he said the kingdom of God is in your midst.

Some translations say within you, but the point is, he's saying it's here, it's now, you just can't see it. And in another place, in Matthew 12, 28, when they said that Jesus was casting out demons by Beelzebub, he corrected them and said, no, I'm not. He says, I'm not casting out demons by Beelzebub, but if I'm in fact casting out demons by the spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

The kingdom of God has overtaken you, Matthew 12, 28 says. So, Jesus indicated the

kingdom had arrived in the person of the king. You see, a kingdom isn't really a place.

A kingdom is an arrangement. A kingdom is an economy where persons acknowledge a king and are subject to him. And that's how the Jews understood it.

They understood it to be a political kingdom, which they were apparently mistaken about. It was a spiritual kingdom, but nonetheless, they never thought of the kingdom as where they go after they die. They were looking for God to restore the kingdom to Israel.

Now, heaven exists, and I certainly believe we go there when we die, but you'd be hard pressed to find anything Jesus said about going to heaven. Now, he did warn against going to Gehenna, but talking about heaven was just not his subject matter. But he talked all the time about the kingdom, all his parables.

The kingdom of God is like this. The kingdom of God is like that. In fact, if you look at those parables and see what he said the kingdom of God is like, you know he's not talking about heaven.

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that starts out very small, like the least of the seeds, and grows into a great tree and birds lodge into branches. That's not talking about heaven. Or the kingdom of God is like leaven that's put into a lump of meal and it causes the whole lump to rise.

Or the kingdom of God is like sowing seeds and some falls on this kind of ground and some on that kind and some on that kind. He's talking about stuff that's going on here. He's not talking about what happens after we die.

The kingdom of God is simply this. The world lies in the lap of the wicked one. This has been so apparently since the time of the fall.

But God promised throughout the Old Testament that he was going to establish his kingdom under his king. And that would be the Messiah. And the Messiah would come and he would invade this world and establish his kingdom.

And the way Daniel put it in Daniel 2, when he was interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream. You may remember the dream Nebuchadnezzar had. There's a statue of a head of gold, a chest of silver, a belly of bronze, legs of iron, feet of iron and clay.

And there's a stone that came and struck this image in the feet and caused it to crumble. Then the stone itself grew to be a great mountain to fill the whole earth. And when Daniel gave the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he said, well, these metals of this image, these are different empires.

Nebuchadnezzar, you're the head of gold, the Babylonian. There's going to be another one after you, which turned out to be the Median Persian Empire, the chest of silver, the

Greek Empire, the belly of bronze, the Roman Empire, the legs of iron. But he said, there's going to be another kingdom, the kingdom of God.

In Daniel 2, verse 44, he says, In the days of these other kings, the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and it will break in pieces all of these kingdoms. Now notice, these are earthly kingdoms. If the kingdom that God established is going to break up these kingdoms and grow to be a great mountain to fill the earth, we're not talking about heaven here, we're talking about earth.

God's kingdom, like the kingdoms that it displaces, has its history, has its function on earth. Now each of us, of course, we're not going to be like the kingdom itself in the sense that we can't participate permanently in it until after the resurrection, but each of us comes into the kingdom when we come to Christ. And that kingdom grows like a stone growing into a great mountain because it has absorbed more.

When I was a little kid, the movie that scared me more than any movie I'd ever seen on television when I was about five years old was The Blob. Ever see The Blob? That scared me to death. Steve McQueen's first, one of his early movies.

Yeah, he was not that well known then. He was a teenager. Steve McQueen was in it.

Which is funny because it was such a corny movie, it's amazing that someone who became as big as he did was in that movie. But the movie was great as an allegory. I don't know if it was intended by that, but I was terrified of The Blob as a child.

I had bad dreams about it all the time after I saw the movie. But when I came to understand the kingdom of God and what the Bible says about it, it's an allegory. I don't know, the writer might not have known it, but I did.

Because this stone came from heaven and landed on earth, a meteorite, in a farmer's field. He comes out and taps it with a stick and it cracks open. There's this blob type stuff like jello or jelly.

It gets onto this stick and he's kind of curious, so he holds the stick up and it comes down and it gets on his arm and he can't get it off. And it eats him alive. It becomes as big as he is.

It starts out little, but it gets bigger because it ate him. Then it starts rolling through town. It's not real fast, but it catches up with everybody.

It eats people. Wherever it goes, it eats people. And then it's bigger because they're part of it now.

Eventually it's big enough to cover a whole restaurant. This is like the climax of the movie. The good guys are in the restaurant and the blob has covered the whole

restaurant.

It's going to eat them and the restaurant too, I guess. Anyway, they freeze it and take it off to the North Pole or something and that's the end of that. Spoiler alert.

Anyway, when I see that, I think, well, there's this stone that comes from heaven and it absorbs people and it becomes bigger. And that's what Daniel said the kingdom of God would be like. It's like this stone.

It strikes the image in the feet and it begins to consume. It comes to grind them up and it replaces them and becomes a great mountain to fill the earth. This is the kingdom of God.

It's an earthly phenomenon that is predicted. It is an earthly phenomenon that Jesus describes. Now, I'm not talking about the ultimate perfection of the world.

I'm not a post-millennialist. If you are, that's fine. It doesn't bother me, but I'm not talking about ultimately the world being perfected.

But I do believe that God established when the king landed on hostile territory called earth and he began to call to himself people to follow him. He called them not just so they could get their ticket to heaven. He called them to be his body, his community, his kingdom, his subjects on earth.

And, of course, this means that the kingdom of God has an earthly destiny, too. Now, we're going to die, but then we resurrect and eventually the kingdom will be acknowledged by all and Christ, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus as Lord. The kingdom of God will have absorbed the whole world.

But in the meantime, it's absorbing people one at a time, you and me and others. But the question is, now that I've been absorbed, what does that mean for me? Does it mean that, okay, I've been absorbed in this blob and now that means I get to someday die and go to heaven? That is literally what I thought when I was growing up in the church. I thought you get saved, say the sinner's prayer, get yourself baptized, hang on until you die and go to heaven.

I was 16 before I ever heard the expression, some young man, a Jesus freak, came up to me and said, he says, what's God doing in your life? What's God doing in my life? That's a strange concept. What do you mean God does things? I just thought I accepted Jesus in my heart and I'm going to heaven someday. I didn't have any vision at all for God doing something here and now with me.

And what I'm trying to say is what God is doing and has been doing since Jesus landed here is manifesting and spreading his kingdom through the conversion of people who are his former enemies who come over, lay down their arms, stop resisting, bow the knee,

submit to him, say Jesus is Lord and mean it. And someday every knee is going to bow and every tongue is going to confess that Jesus is Lord. In the meantime, we decided to do it now and avoid the rush.

And once we have embraced Christ as Lord, that doesn't just mean now I'm a follower of Jesus. It means I'm part of this community of people who are followers of Jesus. And the community, like all societies, has a culture that is defined by its values, its beliefs, its practices, culture.

You see, it's a counterculture. It can exist in any culture. It thrived in pagan Rome while its chief leaders were being killed.

The kingdom grew. It thrived in Jerusalem under persecution. It thrived in modern times in China under communism.

It has thrived in America and sometimes in the past during revivals. It obviously thrived in Ireland through the influence of Patrick. If you study that history, it's wonderful history.

What happened to Ireland because of Patrick's influence. But the point is Christianity is not a religion, it's a kingdom. It's more like a political phenomenon than a religious phenomenon because it has a king.

We think of Jesus simply as our object of worship and he is that. He is our object of worship, but he's not just object of religious veneration. He's our king that has practical ramifications.

That means we're supposed to be doing what he said. Jesus said, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and you're not doing what I said? That doesn't make sense. He said, many will say to me, Lord.

He says, not everyone who says Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father in heaven. Doing what he wants. Now, he wants us to do something.

And when Christians actually begin to do it as a group, then it is counter the normal culture of our times. Because the normal culture is still following the wicked one. Jesus called Satan the God of this world.

And when he said this world, he didn't mean the planet. He meant the dominant culture of those who are not following God. They are following instead the God of this world, Satan.

And so, Jesus said, if you are of this world, the world would love its own. But because I've called you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Well, if I'm called out of the

world, I'm not just called to go up into the sky.

Remember, later on, Jesus said, just a couple chapters ago, he said, Father, I don't pray that you take them out of the world. But that you keep them from the wicked one. He's not removing us from the planet.

He didn't save us so we could be removed from the planet. He saved us so we could do something, be his witnesses, not just verbally, but in our lives corporately. And be an alternative society that calls those who are outside of Christ to come and join and follow our King too.

But when you've come to follow our King, you need to really follow him. See, this is why it's such a hard thing now to talk to people about Christianity in our culture. Because we have churches that are full of people who don't necessarily have any strong convictions about following Jesus.

I mean, there are people there who do have those convictions. I'm not trying to say they aren't there. But there's many or more who are there who, they're not even sure why they're there.

They're there because someone told them the sermons were entertaining or the music was good or they feel better because they were raised going to church than if they don't go to church or whatever. I mean, there's lots of people who are not serious about following Jesus. And their lives make up the complexion and the culture of the institutional church, at least as much as the real Christians in the group do.

There's not a radically counter-cultural phenomenon in the institutional churches. As a matter of fact, the institutional churches are doing their best to bring the world's culture in and to avoid having anything distinctive about their culture because they don't want unbelievers coming in and not feel immediately at home. It seems to me that there should be a sense of difference when you step into the community of Christ out of the darkness or when you step out of the church into the darkness.

It seems like it should feel different. But many churches today just want the worldly culture to be the same as the Christian culture so that we're being seeker sensitive, they say. The seekers can come in and they don't have to be really committed and they can just feel, hey, I feel at home here.

We have the same kind of music we have at the concerts. We have the same kind of entertainment here and there and so forth. And like I said, I think last time, the church is trying to compete with the world on these cultural things.

But unfortunately for the church, it can't compete with the world because we don't have the budget and we don't have the talent pool. If you're going to bring in Christian comedians, I've heard Christian comedians. Nice, clean humor.

They're nice. God bless them. They're not anywhere near as funny as the secular comedians.

Same thing with the Christian musicians. There's some great Christian musicians, I'll tell you what. But you can always tell the difference when you're listening to a Christian radio station or a secular radio station.

There's something in the quality of the production and talent. So why is that? Because the world has a bigger talent pool and they take the cream of that big pool and they put the very best on the radio. We have a little talent pool.

We take the best of our group and put them on too. But it's not like that big talent pool. If we're going to compete with the world in the area of entertaining people, we're going to be fighting a losing battle.

But the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. We're not supposed to change the world through those means. There is something distinctive that Jesus Christ has given us to do.

And when we do it, when we take it seriously, then we as a community, as an alternative society following another king, one Jesus, we will look culturally different. Now, I don't mean we'll wear funny hairstyles like I do, or we'll have funny clothes, or we'll do goofy things. I'm saying that all the things that characterize Christ will characterize His people collectively because they're His body.

John said, as He is, so are we in this world. That's supposed to be the case. We're supposed to be in this world like He is.

Now, there's nobody who ever thought Jesus was silly or goofy. There's people who didn't like Him. Usually they were terrified.

But they didn't think He was silly. Most people found Jesus to be awesome. Most people found Jesus to be genuine.

A refreshing difference from the Pharisees and other religious people they'd encountered before. Most people found Jesus to be surprisingly generous-hearted towards sinners. Not what they expected from religious leaders at all, or from the rabbis.

Jesus was very different than they expected, but in good ways. Now, Christians today are different in some cases. Now, some Christians aren't much different.

I mean, there's at least two different kinds of Christians you're likely to meet. And that worldly people meet. On the one hand, there's those Christians who don't even know why they're Christians.

And they do everything the way the world does in their life. And they go to church and act like they're Christians one day a week. And so the worldly peoples know they go to

church.

They might even go to church and see them there and say, Oh, I know that guy. He's in the office with me. Or he plays softball with me on Saturdays.

Or he's a, you know, I saw him down at the mall recently. But the trouble is, what they see in this person's life when he's not at church does not impress them that the man has anything different that makes him better than anyone else in terms of having a desirable life. And most non-Christians have not really seen a Christian that impresses them.

Either because the so-called Christian doesn't differ from them in any respect except he's more judgmental than they are. Or if he's another kind of Christian, he might in fact be much holier than him in external things. But still very religious, still very critical, still very much like the Pharisees who were also, the Pharisees were very much morally superior to the tax collectors and the prostitutes and so forth.

But they weren't godly. They didn't have the spirit of Christ. Jesus was different than the sinners, and he was different than the religious people.

He was something unique. And when the early community of Christians in Jerusalem behaved like Jesus, it was because they met daily. The Bible says they continued daily in the apostles' teaching and in fellowship and in prayers and breaking of bread.

And it says, and none of them said that what they owned was their own, but as anyone had need, those who had lands and so forth were selling them and giving to be distributed to the poor so that there was none that had lack of anything. I'll tell you, that one thing alone would make a huge difference in any culture. Where you have an alternative society where nobody is poor.

Or maybe everybody's kind of poor, but nobody is really lacking anything. Because there has never been a society like that. Even the communists who aim at that kind of society, they don't remedy that.

They just make everyone miserable. But the early Christians, the reason everyone's miserable in a communist society is because no one really has a heart for helping each other. There's just this governmental legal system that forces them to share what they have and then the leaders take it, you know, the disproportionate share and the people that should get it often are still as poor as before.

The Christian community was different because people loved each other. The Christian community was a society who had a distinctive culture which could be summed up as love. And that's what Jesus said.

Jesus said, by this all men will know you're my disciples. If you have love, one for another. Not if you judge one another.

Not if you resemble the world. But if you have something that the world doesn't have, but everyone in the world craves. Which is genuine, the love of God.

The love of God because you love God and because you love all the people that God loves. A culture like that makes a difference. The Bible says in Acts chapter 2 that when the early Christians lived like that it said they had favor with all the people.

No wonder when the apostles preached the Lord added daily to the church. People heard the message and they said, those guys who are preaching that word, they represent that group of people over there who really impressed me. I think I listen to what they have to say because I've always wondered why those people are so different.

I think I listen to this guy. He's talking about that. Nowadays, when someone hears a preacher, whether it's on TV or maybe in a pulpit or radio or somewhere, I think more often than not, they're thinking, there's another one of those Christians.

Boy, do I find those people annoying. Boy, are those people judgmental. Boy, are those people haters.

Isn't that an ironic thing? That a society that Jesus said would be known to be his disciples by their love has now come to be regarded to be distinctive for their hatred. Now, some of that of course is not fair. Because some of the things you do that are loving can be misinterpreted as hateful by people who don't want to be loved in that way.

Like told that they're wrong. That can be a loving thing. Telling someone they're doing the wrong thing can be a very loving thing.

Like you're getting on the freeway the wrong direction. I think you want to turn around and go on the right direction because you're going to get hurt bad. That's a loving thing to say.

If they don't want to hear it, they think you're a hater. But the point is, even though some of that hater's reputation that Christians have today is not justified, some of it unfortunately is. I know.

I was in a home meeting not too long ago, and one of the guys was saying, you know, someone raised the question, you know, what would Jesus do today if he came into the homosexual community? You know, how would he respond to them? And one of the guys there, who apparently counted himself to be a mature and great Christian guy, I mean, he was very full of how righteous he was apparently, he said, oh, Jesus would come and start turning over their beds and throwing them out. I thought, yeah, I guess that's what he did to the prostitutes too, isn't it? Oh, he didn't? Oh, that must be a different Jesus. Jesus would go and, what, violently disrupt the homes of the homosexuals? Where would anyone get the impression that that would be Jesus' reaction? That would have been that

Christian's reaction, if he had the power to do it.

That's what he wanted to do. And he comforted himself that he had this hatred for the homosexuals, because he figured Jesus would too. But he didn't get that from the Gospels.

You know, Jesus, the tax collectors were the people who were looked at in that society, like modern Christians look at homosexuals today. Jesus, you know, the tax collectors didn't find him to be all that difficult to get along with. And that doesn't mean he approved of what they did.

I'm not saying Jesus was, you know, not critical. But he loved people. And the most radical thing about Christianity is love.

Taking a hard stand against homosexuality or any other moral problem in the world, that's not radically Christian. It may be consistent with Christianity to oppose that behavior, of course. It's also consistent with Judaism.

It's consistent with Islam. It's not radically Christian. It's just radically moral.

But radically moral and radically Christian are not the same thing. Radically Christian means something that is done in obedience to Jesus Christ the way he would do it in the spirit of Christ. And if people saw that, they'd see Jesus more.

And then when they'd hear us preach about Jesus, they'd say, Oh, I've encountered him in that person or those people over there. I think I like that. I'd like to hear more about him.

I think people would more. And anyway, that's what we're talking about. We're talking about a group consensus among all believers that we need to live radically like Jesus and be like Jesus.

So when the world sees us, they see Jesus. You know, one of the hardest things for me has always been in the past 40 years when witnessing to people that when I want to tell them about Jesus, they want to talk about some Christian they knew. And it wasn't a good one usually.

It was a Christian who ripped them off in some business deal or ran off with their wife or did something like that. And they always want to talk about some Christian when I want to talk about Jesus. And you know what I've had to say, and I have to just hold my nose and say it because I wish I didn't have to say it.

Don't look at Christians. Look at Jesus. But you know, guys, where are they supposed to see Jesus? I thought they were supposed to see Jesus in the Christians.

Why? How tragic is it that we would ever have to say, Don't look at the Christians. Look

at Jesus. We should be able to say, You want to see Jesus? There's the Christians.

They live like him. They are a good example of what he's like. You want to know Jesus? Remember Richard Wurmbren? You know who he was? He was the Romanian Lutheran pastor in communist Romania.

He was in prison for 14 years, tortured frequently. One of the guards who tortured him later ended up in the same cell with him because the communists kept, there's a turnover of people in favor in the communist party. The guy who's in favor one week was in the prison the next week because someone else wanted to replace him and didn't trust him, so they put him in.

And Richard Wurmbren was in the ward where, one of the sick wards in the prison where people usually didn't come out alive. He's the only prisoner who came out alive from that ward. And it turned out that a guard who had formerly beaten him and tortured him was thrown in there as a prisoner too because he had that disease as well.

And what did Richard Wurmbren do? He washed the man's feet. Now, interesting, the way this guard had tortured Wurmbren was by beating him on the feet with a club. He had beaten his, Richard Wurmbren to the day of his death afterwards could not walk or could not, I should say, he could walk.

He couldn't wear shoes. I heard him preach a number of times. He's been dead for a while, but he had to preach barefoot because he couldn't wear shoes because his feet had been so mangled by torture and by beating.

This guard had been the guy who beat his feet. And when they found themselves in prison together, Richard Wurmbren washed the guy's feet and gave him his portion of food, and he just served him and so forth. And the guard died, but before he died, he said, Pastor Wurmbren, you always have mentioned Jesus to me.

What is Jesus really like? And Richard Wurmbren said, Well, he's a lot like me. And shouldn't every Christian be able to say that? You know, when I first heard that, I thought, Oh, that sounds almost like arrogant. Why should that be arrogant? That should be exactly what Christians say.

He's a lot like me. I'm more like him because I'm his follower, and I'm doing what he would do to you. You see, instead of saying, Don't look at Christians, look at Jesus, we should say, Look at the Christians.

Jesus is a lot like that. And that was the way it was in the early church, and that's the way it has been at times in various places in other parts of the world throughout church history, usually for very short periods of time. The institutional church, however, has very often not been that way.

Now, I haven't even started working on my notes, and yet we're out of time. But let me read just some quotes that were not in the notes last time, and they're in the notes now. So let me just turn you to the second page of the note.

And I mentioned last time that the two approaches that many Christians vary between when they're trying to decide how to relate with the dominant culture are A, cultural accommodation, and B, cultural domination. Now, cultural accommodation is when the church tries to bring the world's culture in so that the worldly person who comes into the church feels like he's at home. The Christians have everything the same.

They don't have confrontational sermons. They don't want to do anything to make the person feel uncomfortable. They want it to feel like they've walked into a movie house.

They want it to feel like they've come to a party, or something like that. There's video clips that are entertaining. There's rock music.

The preacher's a great entertainer. Let's just kind of make the unbeliever feel like he's moved into someplace he might go for entertainment sometime, and then we can maybe slip God in there somehow. Of course, we can't do it most of the time because that would make him uncomfortable, but once in a while, maybe we can just kind of hint that there might be a God.

This is the extreme case, but there are churches that actually take that approach. That's accommodating the dominant culture. But then there's those who are like militant.

They want to dominate the culture. They want to say, we've got to elect all Christian politicians. We've got to get Christians into City Hall.

We've got to get Christians on the school board. We've got to get Christians on the Supreme Court. We're going to just have Christian culture imposed upon our society.

We're going to have a Christian nation, by golly. And that is not really what Jesus did either. But what we find, the strategy of Christ was that Christians should be a counter-cultural phenomenon.

Actually, turn to page three. I said page two. Look at page three of your notes.

Matthew 13, 33. Jesus said, The kingdom of God, or kingdom of heaven, is like leaven, which a woman put into three measures of meal until the whole was leavened. Now, I realize that if you've been in dispensational teaching, then the meaning of this is probably opposite in your thinking of what it really is.

Because dispensationalists say, well, leaven is evil. Why? Well, because Jesus said, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. So leaven is evil.

Well, in some allegories, it is. Not in this one, though. He said, The kingdom of God, the

kingdom of heaven, is like leaven.

Leaven is not evil here. Leaven is something good. It's the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which someone puts into an element, and it spreads and changes where it is.

It changes the elements that are its host. You put leaven in a lump of dough, and the dough rises. It changes the whole shape of the thing.

And so also, the kingdom of heaven added to this world's society is like yeast. It permeates. It changes things.

But how? But how? Is it through political processes? I think it's not. I think it's through being radically Christian, radically Christian different. Actually, look at the bottom.

I'm misleading you about what page we're looking at. Look at the bottom of page two, the second half. Or the last third.

Counterculture. Counterculture is a term that was coined in 1969, not by a Christian. Theodore Roszak, he wrote a book called *The Making of a Counterculture*, and that was the first use of that term in the English language, I believe.

And he was referring to the hippie movement, of course, or that kind of counterculture. But what is a counterculture? Well, a counterculture is like a subculture. In fact, there may not be any real distinctive difference in the dictionary definitions of those two, but I make a slight difference.

A subculture is a group of people who, although they live in one area, one society, they are separate to themselves, and they keep a separate cultural expression. The Amish are an excellent example of this. They live in America, but they keep the old world values that they brought over from Germany and so forth, and they don't change.

They keep the Amish culture through the centuries. The culture around them changes and changes and changes more rapidly as the days go by, but they stay just the same. They're a subculture.

Everything is different around them, but they have their own cultural norms and values and traditions and so forth. The Chinese in Chinatown would be a subculture, an enclave of Chinese people who live in Los Angeles or San Francisco or somewhere else, and they have Chinese food, they speak Chinese language, they have Chinese customs, Chinese architecture. It's like a little China.

They're in America, but they kind of brought China with them, and they've got a Chinese subculture there. Then we have all kinds of youth cultures, whether it's the gangbangers, whether it's the surf culture, the biker culture, whatever. These are subcultures, people who just want to do things together a certain way that other people don't do.

I'm using the word counterculture to mean a subculture with an attitude, and by that I mean that a subculture wants to be left alone to do it their way. They're not saying anyone else should do it. The Chinese in Chinatown are not trying to get the rest of the people in L.A. to eat Chinese food.

Well, they'd like to if they run a Chinese restaurant, but to speak the Chinese language, for example. They're not trying to infiltrate the world with their culture. They just want to be left alone.

The Amish just want to be left alone. They are a subculture, but they don't have the attitude of saying everybody needs to be like us. But Christianity is a subculture that has that attitude because Christ said so.

Christ said all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me, therefore go out and make disciples and teach them to observe everything I commanded you, all nations. So we have a separate culture, and we maintain, are supposed to maintain, our own distinctives as Christians in the midst of a world that may be more or less favorable. It doesn't matter whether the world is favorable or unfavorable to us.

We have a culture that's defined by our king, not by our nation's trends. However, we are not just a subculture. We believe everyone should follow our king.

We're like the blob. We think that we should take in more and more and more out of the world into Christ, into the kingdom.