

OpenTheo

Introduction



Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg addresses issues surrounding cultural accommodation and dating from a Christian perspective. Drawing on biblical teachings, Gregg emphasizes the importance of considering the costs of engaging with a culture that opposes Christian values. He argues that Christians need to maintain their prophetic credibility by not attempting to imitate the values of secular society, and instead emphasize the root of Christianity in Jesus Christ. Gregg challenges Christians to critically evaluate their assumptions about culture and engage with the world on the basis of their faith.

Transcript

Tonight, I'm going to give an introduction to a series of lectures that I have given before, but not often before. Only twice before, and that over a period of five years, in view of the fact that many subjects I have re-taught each year because of my involvement in the Great Commission School where we cover the whole Bible and basically the same curriculum year by year each year. There are many subjects that I have taught every year, and some of them every year for the past 16, 17 years.

So, I have taught them many times. I will say it's a challenge to me today when I teach those subjects to have them be fresh and lively to me because I've done them so many times. But this subject, in five years I've taught it only twice previously.

The first time was in 1995, and the occasion for it was that I had been in, I was living in Oregon, and I was invited to speak for a group in California that had a class. They were a Sunday evening home gathering that were attached to a four-square church, actually. They moved eventually away more from the four-square denomination in another direction, but the class, they called it, the evening meeting, they called it a world views class.

And they studied things like apologetics and culture and things like that from a Christian perspective. And I was, well, on many occasions I was invited to come in and speak for them. And on one occasion they asked me to come in and speak about the relationship between young men and young women because most of the people in the class were

single, young adults, college age.

And so I did, and I guess there was a tremendous shock wave that went through the group because Santa Cruz is a very hip, very modern, very worldly town. And many of the young people had been in church youth groups and so forth, which had not challenged very much the norms of the culture in terms of how young men and young women ought to relate to one another when they're not married. And what I had to say was very, well, something they'd never heard of before.

And I wasn't sure, you know, if I'd be tarred and feathered or what. It was very clear that, you know, people were shocked by what I had to say. But afterwards the questions that were asked were all of a positive nature.

And one young man there said that he'd been in church all his life and he'd never heard anything like that. And he wondered if there was a series of tapes or a book or something like that that I could recommend that dealt with these kinds of issues in detail. And I told him at the time I wasn't aware of any.

And shortly after that I was speaking for Youth with a Mission over in their base in Honolulu. Now that is a YWAM base I've been to over 30 times. And I used to speak there about three times a year.

And so they're very well known and very familiar with that base and with the people over there. And they have a public meeting on Friday nights where not only the YWAM staff and students, but the public come and have an open meeting. And I was - sometimes when I'm at their public meeting I don't have anything on my heart specifically to teach about.

So I'll just open it up to questions and answers from the floor. And so I got questions that night on many different subjects. But one of the questions that someone asked was, what do you believe about dating? And to tell you the truth, I was very intimidated by the question, not because I didn't know the answer.

I knew exactly what I think about dating. But I wasn't so sure I could say it in that company because, again, YWAM is a very youthful, normally college-aged people. There's people of all ages in it, but predominantly college-aged.

This was in Honolulu where people don't wear a lot of clothes. And where - at the Honolulu YWAM base there, there's - you know, the people pay very good attention in the lectures, but then they go out surfing on the beaches after that in their swimwear and so forth. And therefore, there's a lot of stuff in that Honolulu culture that is very worldly.

And, again, my views on dating are somewhat - how shall we say it? Archaic, backward in terms of our society's way of evaluating things. And I just - I told them what I thought.

Again, it was very much against the grain of the dominant culture, even of those that were present, it seemed to me.

And although I answered many different questions on different subjects that night, that one question, when I gave the answer, is the only one that the audience broke into spontaneous applause when I said that I don't believe that God designed people to have more than one relationship in a lifetime with a person of the opposite sex, that God intended for one romance per lifetime, and that it was only in marriage that people should develop, you know, romantic attachment to each other and have physical contact with each other and so forth. And, I mean, those are just a few of the things I said, but I really didn't think that was going to go over well. But it did go over well, and this is five years ago.

And I - from those two experiences, one in Santa Cruz, California, one in Honolulu, both of them very worldly environments, but to young Christian people who lived in those environments, and both of them received a very positive reaction. I got the impression that there is a hunger in Christian young people for an alternative standard which the churches are not presenting. I mean, alternative to the world.

The world, of course, we all recognize, the world's going to hell in a handbasket, and there's, you know, there's no morals left out there. But when you go to the youth groups of the churches or just the churches themselves, apparently it's very difficult for many people to find anything that is starkly in contrast to what the world says on these subjects. And I realized at that time that what we're talking about here is not just - we're not just talking about some miscellaneous topics of modesty and of boy-girl relationships.

We're talking about something where the dominant culture has, you know, totally departed from any kind of biblical moorings, but so has the church's culture. And I realized that in the early church, the reason the early church was as successful as it was is because it did not try to integrate the dominant culture around it, but it had its own distinctive culture. And it didn't care how much that culture resembled or did not resemble the culture around it.

It did not find its bearings with reference to the dominant culture at all. It found its bearings with reference to an absolute authority, which was Jesus Christ. And in following what he said, they generated in their corporate life together a very distinctive phenomenon, an alternative society that dwelt alongside the dominant culture and, in a sense, condemned it by their difference and, in a sense, impacted it too.

Initially, we know, at least in the Jerusalem church, that these very cultural distinctives that came up among the Christian community had favor with all the people. Now, that's partly because, of course, all the people didn't quite understand what the claims of Christ were yet. And when they did, of course, the rebellion in fallen men reacted as it

often does in violent opposition.

But the initial positive reaction of all the people to the Christian community was based on the fact that they saw that the Christian community had a lot going for it that the Jewish culture around them did not have in terms of, well, a lot of terms. And those are the things that I'd like to talk about because I think that that is what is essentially absent in our present society. We do not have, in general, we don't have the churches that name the name of Christ really presenting a cultural alternative to the dominant culture.

What the churches do is they protest some of the more grotesque sins of the dominant culture. Blatant out-of-the-closet homosexuality, abortion on demand or any kind of abortion, and a few other blatant sins like that. We decry X-rated movies and things like that.

But all we really are doing as a church, generally speaking, is seeking to clean up the culture a little bit, the dominant culture, trying to sanitize it a bit, make it a little more comfortable for us to raise our children in. But we're not really presenting a viable alternative to the world, nor to the youth, nor to people of any generation that's alive today, of what it really means to be the people of God, living in God's kingdom, under the authority of Jesus Christ. And when Christians do that, I believe there is a different culture that arises because of it.

Now, I'd like to turn your attention to some scriptures initially. There will be scriptures we'll look at all the way through. I'd like to begin by turning your attention to Luke chapter 14.

And this is one of the places where Jesus lays out the terms of what it means to be a disciple. In Luke 14, beginning with verse 26, Jesus said, But if anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

For which of you intending to build a tower does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it? Lest, after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish. Or, what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So, likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has, he cannot be my disciple.

Now, being a Christian in the Bible is the same thing as being a disciple. There is not a distinction in Scripture between the word disciple and Christian. The word Christian only appears three times in our Bible.

And the first time it appears is where it is defined for us. It is in Acts 11.26 where it says, The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. So, Christian was just another word for disciples.

The disciples, that is what they were called before, came to be called Christians. So, a Christian is the same thing as a disciple. And Jesus told us what things would prevent one from being able to become a disciple.

You cannot be a disciple, He says, if you will not take up your cross and follow me. You cannot be a disciple if you do not hate your father, mother, wife, children, and your own life also. Of course, we have to understand His use of the term hate and the idiom of the time.

Obviously, in the parallel in Matthew chapter 10, we find it stated in terms our culture would understand a little better. Where Jesus said, He that loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me. He that loves wife or children more than me is not worthy of me.

The same thought expressed perhaps a little more clearly without the idiom of the Hebrews over in Matthew 10. But, you know, three times this passage says, If you do not do this, then you cannot be my disciple. Now, in the midst of that, He gives two examples of how necessary it is to really weigh the risks of what you're doing when you contemplate becoming a follower of Jesus.

One of my complaints for many years, having been raised in a church, is that I was never given the opportunity to weigh those risks. When I was presented the gospel in the church I was raised in, they just called people to come forward if you wanted to go to heaven. And I don't recall ever being told in the first 12 years or more of my Christian life in the church, I never remember hearing anyone tell me what the terms of discipleship were.

And here they'd gotten a commitment out of me to who knows what, and didn't even tell me what it was I was in for. I attended a couple of years ago in the town in Oregon, McMinnville, where I used to live until recently, a big production, most of the evangelical churches in the town went in together on this production. It was some theater company that was coming in from outside the area and rented a big hall.

And they had this big play about heaven and hell. Some of you may have seen either it or another version of it. There are several versions of it floating around the country.

But they had some evangelists who came up after this play. By the way, the play also did not really present anything about the terms of discipleship. It basically was about you better accept Jesus so you won't go to hell.

It was essentially the message of the play. And afterwards, an evangelist got up and he

talked for a long time about accepting Jesus without mentioning any of the terms of discipleship. And then he said, how many here are not sure that if you die tonight, you go to heaven? You're not sure you go to heaven? And quite a few hands went up because a lot of the Christians had brought their unsaved friends because there was a big publicity about this thing.

And so a lot of hands went up. And then he says, okay, now those of you who raised your hand, I want you to come down forward. Now, he hadn't even asked them to raise their hand if they wanted to be Christians.

He just said, anyone who isn't sure you're going to heaven, raise your hand. So these people hadn't really made any kind of commitment at all to anything. All they said was they weren't sure they were going to heaven.

But he asked them to come down. I noticed a few rows ahead of me, there was a young man who had raised his hand, but he didn't want to go down. And one of the trained counselors was actually trying to grab him by the arm and pull him down forward.

He wasn't wanting to go, but she finally prevailed, I think. Or maybe she left. I don't remember if he finally went down or not.

But finally, there are a lot of people down front who had been called forward by this evangelist. I don't remember all he said, but I remember the first thing he said is, now we've got counselors here who are going to tell you what you've just committed yourself to. I thought, that is a strange order of events.

You get people to commit themselves to something, or you interpret what they've done as committing themselves to something, and then you tell them what they've committed themselves to. That's not what Jesus did. Jesus said, sit down first and count the cost, and then decide if you want in on this deal.

Now, he gave the example of building a tower as one of the ways of saying that you need to count the cost, but I want to focus on the other illustration he gave in the same context. He said in verses 31 and 32, Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? If not, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation asking for conditions of peace. Now, the idea here is that you're the king, apparently, you're in the position of a king with an attacker coming against you, and you're outnumbered.

You've got ten thousand soldiers on your side, the attacker has twenty thousand soldiers on your side. Now, can you win this war? Now, you might say, no, no way, but that's not necessarily true. With God on your side, you might.

I mean, Gideon won the war with the disparity of troops far greater than that. You never

know, and even without the miraculous element, it's possible that ten thousand highly trained and highly dedicated soldiers might do better in a battle where the twenty thousand coming against them are poorly disciplined and unmotivated. You just don't know right off, just saying, well, there's ten thousand here to defend the city, and there's twenty thousand coming.

You don't know who will win that. But you better sit down and figure it out before you engage in war, because you're outnumbered. And if you don't think that you've got what it takes, if you don't think you've got the commitment and you've got the horses to beat this war, then don't fight at all.

Just send out an ambassador and say, we surrender. That's what conditions of peace mean. Conditions of peace doesn't mean we say, send out a guy and say, we've decided we can't beat you, so would you just go home? We'll have a peaceable solution here.

The only peaceable solution to an invasion is surrender. Now, what Jesus is saying to the people who are contemplating following him is that, if you follow me, you've got to count the cost first. Just like you have to count the cost before you build a tower, you've got to count the cost before you go to war.

This is a war we're calling you to. And frankly, you'll be outnumbered if you follow me. Most people aren't following Jesus.

Now, in the illustration, it was two to one against him. In our own society, notwithstanding the Gallup polls that tell us that 90% or so of Americans are born-again Christians, I would say it'd be less than 5% in my experience, if not much less. But we're outnumbered.

There's no question about that. And there is a war. Now, you don't see any army tanks on the streets yet, and you don't see us wearing fatigues and carrying assault rifles yet.

In Idaho, that's not a very ridiculous scenario. But that isn't happening yet. But we're at a war.

And it is a war that we as Christians interpret as a spiritual warfare, but which even those who are not Christians have noticed it. And they call it by a different name. Do you know what they call it? They call it the culture war.

They don't understand spiritual things. They just see cultures in contrast, the culture of godliness versus the culture of ungodliness. Now, I'm not sure who came up with the term culture war.

I think it was probably Christians who did, or at least conservatives. But when they talk about the culture war, they're actually thinking of something very different than what I'm going to be talking about here. Back in the 70s or 60s, there was a bumper sticker, I

remember, that said something like, what if they had a war and no one came? I'd like to suggest, what if they had a war and everyone came but it was the wrong war? That would be a great waste of energy and resources.

Well, I think many Christians, conservative Christians, are involved in the wrong war. They see themselves engaged in a culture war. But when you hear them flesh out what their vision is, the two cultures that they see at war are the MTV culture war.

That's the modern, pagan, amoral youth culture and so forth that's reflected by even people as old as our president. That's one side of the culture war. And the other culture that they see at war is the leave it to beaver 50s culture.

Neither culture is what I would call a radically Christian counterculture. We're just talking about the pagan culture of the 21st century and the pagan culture of the mid-20th century. Two different pagan cultures.

One much more overtly debauched than the other. The older one being much more civil, civilized, more religiously informed, more secretive about its sins, but not Christian. Now, I grew up in the 50s.

And I was raised in a Christian family, an evangelical family. And not only my parents but my grandparents and virtually everyone in my family were born-again people, at least as I thought they were and I think most of them were. I had the impression virtually everyone in America was a Christian when I was growing up.

Initially when I was very young, I didn't know there were people who weren't Christians. But that was partly due to the fact that even people who weren't Christians mostly wanted to be identified as Christians. I mean, I remember in my teens when I was out witnessing, it was very hard to nail people down where they really stood spiritually because you'd say, are you a Christian? And they'd say, well, sure, I was born in America.

I mean, what do you think, I'm a Muslim? Well, nowadays, born in America might mean you are a Muslim. In fact, even then it could have meant that. But the average person assumed that America was a Christian country.

And more people than not went to church. And churches were a lot of evangelicals back then. Billy Graham's ministry was real big back then, beginning, just beginning back then.

And there was a real strong evangelical thrust in the second half of the 20th century. And even those who were not part of it sometimes thought they were part of it. They might not have understood what it meant to be a Christian, but they thought, well, these Christians, they're better people than most.

And Jesus was good, and the Bible's the word of God. Most people in America in the 50s

really did believe, I think, that the Bible was the word of God. But they didn't care.

They didn't care enough to obey it. But I talked to many unbelievers in the 60s and 70s who said that when they were younger, that when Billy Graham would say, the Bible says, just that phrase just made them sit up and take notice because the Bible, there was an air of authority about the whole mention of the Bible. That's the word of God.

You know, people who didn't even go to church, didn't even have a commitment to Jesus Christ, they just had, there was still this cultural respect for the Bible. And this cultural consensus that Jesus was, you know, the Son of God. Now, most Americans didn't want to follow him, probably then, any more than they do now.

But they had more respect for Christianity. And because of that, public morals and public, you know, discourse and so forth, had much more of a religiously informed Christian aspect to it. And so people who are, and I won't name names because some of them are household words, but many of the people who are the great crusaders on the side of decency and right in the so-called culture war, they want to get us back to those times.

They don't like the fact that the homosexuals are, you know, a special interest group that has political aspirations and tremendous success in what they do. They don't like the fact, and neither do I, by the way. And they don't like the fact that, you know, Roe versus Wade went the way it did.

And now there's all these unborn babies being slaughtered, a lot of innocent blood being shed, bringing judgment on our nation, which judgment we see in our elections. They don't like the fact that some manifestly unchristian things are now taken for granted in our culture as normative. And they want to get us back to a more decent, Christian-like time.

Because back in the 50s, even if everyone wasn't Christian, they still respected Christians. At least that was my experience. It seemed to me that even people who didn't embrace Christianity or profess in any way to be Christians, they respected ministers.

I know because when I went into ministry, and that was in the early 70s, there was still a lot of that. I mean, when people would be swearing up a storm and stuff on the job site or something like that, and someone would tell them that I was a minister, they'd say, oh, sorry, Reverend. You know, like, they'd have to apologize to me, like I'm the one they're offending.

But, I mean, they didn't care about God, but they still respected, you know, a man of the cloth, or whatever you might want to call it. There was still some assumption that Christianity was a superior way, even if they didn't want to live it. There isn't that

assumption anymore in our culture.

There are very few unbelievers out there that sincerely believe the Bible is the Word of God, that believe that Jesus is anything better than the Buddha or Mohammed or these guys. There's very few who think that being a clergyman in any way suggests that you're better than, you know, a bartender. And, you know, a lot of clergymen have proven that to be the case since then.

And that's part of what caused this. But regardless what caused it, the goal of Christians should not be to retrace our steps and regain what we had back then, before this degeneration took place in our culture. We need to go back further yet and see what happened in the early church when people were following Jesus without the trappings and traditions that have been added in the past 2,000 years.

You know, of course, that for 1,000 years, half of the church age, from about 500 A.D. to about 1500, the entire church was plunged into that medieval darkness called Roman Catholicism. And then there was the Reformation around 1500. And one of the things the Reformation was supposed to be about was getting back to the Bible as the real authority for all matters of faith and practice.

And I believe Luther and Calvin and Zwingli and those guys, I think they probably, at least initially, were sincerely wanting to do just that. And they did rediscover some things in the Bible that had been more or less obscured in the previous 1,000 years. And we can thank God for that.

Some good things were brought back to us. But they didn't change everything. They retained many Roman Catholic traditions.

And so another group rose up among them called the Anabaptists. And their appeal was to go really all the way back and leave nothing in Christianity that isn't in the Bible. The big battle in the 16th century, that was over infant baptism.

Luther and Calvin and all the Reformers still baptized infants, just like the Roman Catholic Church did. The Anabaptists said, there's nothing of that in the Bible. Why don't we get rid of that altogether? That was not considered an innocuous observation.

Those were fighting words, in fact, killing words. And many thousands of Anabaptists were put to death for nothing more controversial than saying we should be baptized after we're converted, not before. Now, the interesting thing is that most evangelicals today think of themselves more in the line of that Anabaptist mentality.

We go back all the way to the Bible for what we do. Then they think of themselves in line with Roman Catholics or even some of the more liturgical type Protestant groups. And yet, the modern church doesn't go all the way back to the Bible really on a consistent basis in my judgment.

And therefore, although Protestants have always said they believe in the Bible as the final and ultimate authority in all matters of faith and practice, many things in the faith and practice of evangelicals do not come from the Bible. And if they did, we would stand in greater contrast to even the culture of the 50s. Remember the culture of the 50s or leave it to Beaver and Ozzie and Harriet.

That was the culture that spawned the generation of the 60s. I mean, I was born in the early 50s, and I was a teenager in the 60s and 70s. And my generation is the one that got us into this mess.

I mean, the present occupant of the White House, he's older than I am, but he's part of the culture that my generation, particularly the older people of my generation older than me, introduced what we call the hippie culture. And what I find interesting about this is that the hippie culture was a counterculture that did not have, when it arose 30, 40 years ago, the hippie culture did not have on its side, on its team, didn't have any newspapers on its side. They didn't own any newspapers.

There were not very many rich people or influential people. There were certainly no senators or high-ranking politicians in this culture initially. But you know what? In 30 years, that culture took over and became the dominant culture in America without an army, without a single politician in their corner initially.

Now they're all there, but without owning any of the major media, somehow this countercultural movement became, in 30 years' time, the dominant culture of a country that had at one time considered itself Christian. Now, I believe that Christianity was instituted to be a counterculture that is also at war with the dominant culture, but it is as much at war with the pagan culture of Ozzie and Harriet as it is at war with the pagan culture of MTV. In the days of Ozzie and Harriet, people, when they got divorced, were ashamed of it.

Today, they're not ashamed of it anymore. When they committed adultery, they kept it behind closed doors and they didn't parade it on primetime TV. Now, they just put it on primetime TV.

Oh, they did have the soaps back then too. That's true. But they, you know, when they, when kids, girls didn't get pregnant very much in the 50s.

And when they did, they couldn't just go off and get an abortion, at least not without parental consent. In other words, things were much tidier back then, but most of those sins were still being committed, maybe not as widespread. But the point I'm making is not that we need to clean up the American culture even more than it was in the 50s, but that we need to not set our sights on restoring anything resembling American culture at any time in America's history, but we need to go back all the way to Christ and the apostles and see what culture is generated by complete obedience to the teachings of

the New Testament.

And that will not resemble any culture that this country has ever had, with the possible exception of some small local cultures in the founding period of our nation in certain, you know, colonies or towns. But, and even that, I wouldn't equate with what I'm talking about here. Christianity is not something that Jesus established just to get people on the fast track to heaven.

Sure, he wants us to go to heaven. He died in order to provide a new and living way into the presence of God. But he didn't just save us and then zap us to go on up into heaven.

That would have been much more convenient, frankly. I would like it very much if I could have just gotten saved and then gone directly to heaven. Not have to fight any of the battles, not have to have the risk of, you know, backsliding or falling into sin or bringing reproach on the name of Christ or embarrassment to myself and so forth.

You know, there is allegedly a time in history when they used to baptize the pagans that they converted and then kill them. So they wouldn't backslide and make sure they go to heaven. I don't know if that really happened, but I've heard that story before.

I don't know if that's apocryphal or what. But, you know, that kind of thinking really makes sense. If all that Jesus came to do is to get people to heaven, then you might as well just kill them as soon as you baptize them so they'll all get there.

I know a lot of people who got baptized who died and aren't in heaven now because they didn't live for Jesus Christ. And so, Jesus had something more in mind when He gave Himself and came and presented the Father's will to us. And that was to get us to heaven when we die, but He didn't let us die right away.

He makes us stay here for some reason. And it's not just a time for us to take the hits and be bombarded and be tested and say, I'm going to persevere and hold on to my faith and I'm not going to apostatize and I'm going to go to heaven in the end. Some people interpret it that way.

You know, when Jesus said, Upon this rock I've built my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. When I was young, I always pictured that imagery as, Okay, here's the church on a rock and the storms of hell are coming against it and attacking it, but we're going to stand, we're going to be firm, we're not going to disappear, we're going to survive. But that's not what it suggests.

Talking about the gates of hell? An army doesn't attack with its gates. The gates are its defense against invasion. When Jesus speaks of the gates of hell, He's talking about the church as an invading force against the kingdom of darkness.

And darkness closes the gates, but the gates cannot withstand the power of Jesus Christ

carried by a faithful church. Now, Jesus had in mind that His people, you know, carry the gospel to all nations. Again, not just to get people to heaven.

That is the end result, of course, and we all rejoice in that. But so that lives could be transformed. And once those lives have been transformed, that corporately the community of those whose lives have been transformed can be an alternative society in this world that brings glory to Jesus Christ in the midst of a world that does not.

Now, this has a lot to do with what Jesus meant when He said to His disciples in Matthew chapter 5, You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world. Now, these statements suggest some things about the world. One is the world is rotting.

The world is decaying. The world is going downhill. And salt, its primary purpose in biblical times was to retard decay.

And so the churches here, not necessarily to make the world not decay at all. We can't stop that entirely. But our presence should have a preserving effect on a world that would otherwise decay so rapidly.

Probably no one would get saved before God had to bring judgment on everything. When He says that we are the light of the world, it suggests that the world in general is in darkness. They don't know where they're going.

They're stumbling around without any light except for, well, us. But then He said of the church, when He said you're the light of the world, He says you're a city that is set on a hill that cannot be hid. The people of God are a community on earth that are likened to a city, a heavenly city, a new Jerusalem, according to Hebrews chapter 12.

And that city has its own citizenry. It has its own king, another king, one Jesus. And it has its own standards.

Now, one of the biggest problems that occurred in the church to foul this up was the conversion of Constantine, if it was a true conversion. Historians can't agree and will never know until we go to heaven if Constantine is there or not. But Constantine was the emperor of Rome.

And the end of a long string of emperors that had been actually persecuting the church. But he professed conversion to Christianity himself. And then Christianity became sort of mixed together with the culture and the society of Rome.

That's when things like, you know, well, I mean, a lot of the pagan religious things, holidays and so forth, became incorporated and reinterpreted with Christian names and so forth. And the church and the world just became blended to a great degree. And we live, you know, at the end of about 1700 years of that process.

And even though there's a lot of Christianity in this part of the world where we live, this nation, there is still an assumption that exists in many Christians that the goal of Christianity is to sanctify the nation of America. And to get rid of the, you know, bad stuff and clean up the place. And I don't know that the Bible ever said that the church is going to clean up the whole world.

We're going to give light to the world. But Jesus said light comes in the world and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil and that's their condemnation. That they see light but they reject light.

Just the fact that you bring light to the world doesn't mean the world will accept it. The church has a role to play vis-a-vis the world around it. And that role to play, I'm going to suggest to you, is very tied up with this idea of being a radically alternative, counter-cultural force in the world.

And I want to talk about some of the theories that Christians have about the relationship of Christ or Christianity and the culture. There's a lot of books being written on this now. You may not be reading those kinds of books and that's fine.

And I haven't read any of them that were any good. Every time I see another book is published by some known Christian about Christianity and culture, I buy it and try to read through it. And usually after a few chapters, I put it aside and say, he does not say anything that's true either.

What I find is that Christians are aware that something has gone wrong in our culture. And therefore, they're trying to say, we as Christians need to engage the culture. We need to be Christians in the midst of this new phenomenon of a corrupt culture that didn't exist, as they think, 50 years ago.

And it kind of takes by surprise. And so there's all these thinkers. These guys are scholars, seminarians and so forth.

They're writing books about how Christianity is supposed to relate to the culture. And there's essentially two philosophies out there. I disagree with both of them.

I'm desiring to present a third alternative. But let me tell you what the two philosophies are. I'm sure you've encountered both of them.

One philosophy is that the church ought to be culturally relevant and culturally sensitive to the pagan culture around it. This is, I just call this the theory of accommodation, cultural accommodation. We live in a, you know, they say you can't turn the clock back.

You know, you know, if kids are going to date, they're going to date. You can't turn the clock back and go back, some older way of doing it. This is the culture we live in.

The church has to be relevant to the modern culture. It has to be sensitive. We don't want to offend the cultures.

We see this even in the missionary philosophy. There's been, you know, missionaries got a bad rap a few decades back because certain books like Hawaii indicated that American missionaries had been very insensitive to the cultures of the pagans that they had reached and had turned them all into, you know, American culture clones and so forth. And missionaries didn't like that kind of bad rap.

So the missiology took a turn to be more culturally affirming of, you know, to affirm as much as you can in these pagan cultures. I'm sure you want to call people out of the gross sins, but you affirm whatever isn't too offensive in their culture. You need to be culturally sensitive.

Well, that now applies to many modern churches. In fact, the very largest churches in our country right now are churches that follow a philosophy that's sometimes been called seeker sensitive. And seeker sensitive means there's people out there who are allegedly seekers.

What they're seeking is not clear. Apparently, they're not seeking God because then you'd present God because that'd be sensitive to what they're seeking. But rather, these people are seeking something else.

I guess they're seeking, I guess, a sense of community with people who have, you know, who are nice and who can sing well and can do dramas on the platform of their churches and things. I guess that's what the seekers are seeking because that's what the seeker sensitive churches are presenting. And basically, the philosophy there seems to be, I don't know if they ever state it this way, but it seems to be that if you can't beat them, join them.

You know, this is like, you know, there's 10,000 of us, there's 20,000 of them. Let's sound out an ambassador of peace. We'll have a peaceful coexistence with the dominant culture and we'll basically take in as much of it as we can and we'll attract people to the gospel this way.

You know, we'll adopt the music and the clothing styles and all the stuff of the world because that's what's hip and that's what draws people. And after all, why not? You know, we want big churches and that's one way to get them. Don't offend the culture.

And let's accommodate it as much as we can. That is one philosophy that is very common and I think probably the most common in the largest churches in our country right now. I'd like to read to you some quotes that I find relevant to this phenomenon.

This is a letter that somebody wrote to the editor of Christianity Today back in 1995, August 14th, 1995. This man's name is Wesley Knox Ramsey from Burns, Tennessee.

He's not well known.

He just wrote a letter to the editor. But I like this letter. He said this, quote, I am an evangelical, more conservative than most, a southern Baptist.

But I am regularly in contact with fellow Christians of all shades of practice. What I see in the churches is a deliberate abandonment of the historical and intellectual heritage of Christendom in the name of reaching the lost at any cost, resulting in a lightly Christianized version of the American secular culture. And presented so far as to eliminate all alienating factors that are not essential to the gospel itself.

I privately wonder when I see this in action, which member of the church staff will be assigned ultimately to inform the converts that the church is essentially and radically different from the world. And that they were deceived in order to get them in the door. In the mad dash to make the gospel either culturally or intellectually inoffensive, it is robbed of both its power and its poetry, unquote.

I'd also like to quote Kenneth Scott Lattin, who's one of the better known church historians of modern times. He's written multi volumes on church history. I've got two lengthy sets of church history that he's written in and his works are textbooks and Bible colleges and so forth on church history.

He's one of the better known, probably the best known church historian of our time, Kenneth Scott Lattin. He made this comment, quote, Christianity, if it is not hopelessly denatured, never becomes fully at home in any culture. Always, when it is true to its genius, it creates tension, unquote.

Now, that's a church historian who knows church history like very few other people. He says there's hardly ever a time when Christianity is introduced into a pagan culture where it is comfortable without tension. It's not supposed to have no tension with the culture.

It is an invading force. It is there to supplant. It is there to condemn and to retrieve and to save and to enlighten.

It is not there to simply exist without tension. And he says, I love the way he says this, if it's not, Christianity, if it is not hopelessly denatured, never becomes fully at home in any culture. Always, when it is true to its genius.

And there is a unique genius of Christianity because it is God's word, God's mind revealed. There's a genius there at work. And when it is true to its genius, it creates tension with the existing culture.

The churches that are trying to have as little tension as possible with the dominant culture in America, in order to not offend very many people and draw in more seekers,

they don't seem to realize this, it seems to me. To me, it's a very wrong-headed philosophy. But I've never been very opinionated.

A third quote comes from one of my favorite writers, A.W. Tozer, in his book, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*. In an article at the end of that book, an editorial called, *The Saint Must Walk Alone*. He said this, quote, *The weakness of so many modern Christians is that they feel too much at home in the world.*

In their effort to achieve restful adjustment to the unregenerate society, they have lost their pilgrim character and have become an essential part of the very moral order against which they were sent to protest. The world recognizes them and accepts them for what they are, and this is the saddest thing that can be said about them. Now, these are observations of people who I think all of them are astute observers.

To the wrong-headedness of the church thinking that, you know, what we need to do is kind of take on, like a chameleon takes on the color of its environment, the church in every culture has to kind of take on as much as possible, the styles, the tastes, the values to a certain extent of whatever culture it's in, and not have any tension. But there is tension. There's tension between Christ and Satan.

There's tension between darkness and light. What fellowship has darkness and light? What concord has Christ and Belial? Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6, None is the answer. There is conflict and there needs to be conflict.

We need to... I think the churches that take this philosophy of cultural accommodation need to be confronted with several important questions. I'd like to pose these questions to them if I had the opportunity. One of them is, has not Jesus provided his people with their own distinctive cultural identity and expression? Certainly when you read the second chapter of Acts, it gives that impression.

We have quite a nice description of the way these people lived among themselves and related to each other their economic life and their religious life and their social life and so forth. It was very different than that of the culture around them. And this was being true to what Jesus had taught them to do.

Another question I'd like to ask about that is, is it our place as Christians to affirm the local secular culture or to present a biblical alternative? When Jesus talked about being the light of the world and the salt of the earth, he certainly didn't indicate that the worldly culture is very good on its own. It's not very enlightened. It needs light from us, not the other way around.

A third question I'd like to ask is, does the new convert only need a slight readjustment of his life so as to be free from self-destructive behaviors like gross sin, but otherwise to blend in with the dominant culture? Some people think so. But Jesus said, if you are of

the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world and I have called you out of the world, I've chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

That's John 15, 9. The world is one thing. We are another. The world has its ways and we have ours, and that's why the world hates you.

It doesn't hate you because you have a label, Christian, that doesn't have any content other than that you believe Jesus died and you're going to go to heaven when you die. What they hate about you is you do not embrace their way of life. In fact, the very failure on your part to embrace their way of life is the thing that threatens them because they know in their conscience that their way of life is not defensible morally, and the only assurance and peace they have about living that way is being surrounded with people who all affirm their way of life.

But when they meet people who don't affirm it, they get very nervous and hostile. Peter talked about this phenomenon in 1 Peter 4. He said in 1 Peter 4, beginning at verse 2, he said that you should no longer live the rest of your life in the flesh for the lusts of men, that is to please men, but for the will of God. In verse 3, 1 Peter 4, 3 says, For we have spent enough of our past lifetime doing the will of the Gentiles when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

In regard to these, they think it's strange that you do not run with them to the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They think it's strange you're not running with them in their way anymore. You've got an alternative way of life that doesn't affirm their way of life anymore.

You're not running on their path with them, and they speak evil of you, and sometimes they do harsher things than that. The point is, the world hates you. We're not supposed to give a convert the idea that all he has to do is get rid of some of the grosser sins in his life.

Okay, you've got to stop substance abuse in your life. You've got to stop that adulterous affair you're involved in. You've got to stop a few other things that we know that are really scandalous.

But otherwise, we tend to let them kind of blend in with the rest of the world and create as little offenses as they can. Why? Jesus didn't live that way. The apostles didn't live that way.

The early Christians didn't believe that was the way to live. Why do we think that's the way to live? Well, because Christianity has been denatured, hopelessly denatured, and deprived of its genius in the modern church. And not just the modern church.

The church for many centuries had this problem in various other cultural environments.

Here's a question I'd like to ask those secret sensitive churches. And that is this.

Has the church lost credibility as a prophetic voice and a conscience to society by giving the impression that the world's ideas are better than those bequeathed to the church of God? In other words, Jesus taught us a way to live and the world has its way of living. We copy them. Are we not saying by our actions that they have a better way? After all, why else would we follow them if we didn't think so? You know, shouldn't we be holding out a totally different thing? You know, salt is good for preserving meat from decay.

But it's only good for doing so because salt is not meat. The more like meat salt could become, if it could become, the less useful it would be and the more it would just decay with the rest of the meat. The only reason that salt is useful to meat in this respect is because salt is essentially by nature something entirely different than meat.

The meat is by nature something that will rot. Salt is something that, when it's true to its genius, will prevent that rot. But Jesus said, if the salt loses its saltiness, where then will it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing but be cast forth and trodden under the foot of men.

Is that a good description of how the church is being treated in our culture? Do you feel like you as a Christian have been cast forth by the culture and trodden under the feet of men? I'm not trying to be overly dramatic. I just think that that's what Jesus warned about and that's pretty much where the church is in our culture. And you know what? The compromised church has no prophetic voice to the world because the world knows the church isn't supposed to be like them.

At least many in the world know instinctively these Christians, they're supposed to be standing for something but they're not. And you know what? While you see an uncompromised Christian is a tremendous threat to a worldly person, he's likely to be respected more by that worldly person than a compromised Christian who's going to simply be despised because they know he's spineless and compromised. Another question I'd like to ask to those who hold this philosophy of cultural accommodation in the church is this.

Did Jesus give the impression that the lost should be won on their own terms resulting in a large body of uncommitted disciples or that the church should be comprised of a smaller body of people who have come to God on His terms? You see, by accommodating church to the unbelievers' tastes, it's as if we're saying, Jesus will take you on your terms. Instead of saying, no, we're going to do it the way Jesus taught us to do it. If you don't like it, go your own way, that's fine.

If you want God, this is one of the places He can be found and we'll faithfully teach what He said. When the rich young ruler didn't want Jesus on his own terms, that is on Jesus' terms, the man went away. Jesus didn't go after him and try to accommodate him.

He didn't go back and say, well, listen, I didn't mean to offend you by what I said about giving up all you have and giving to the poor. I realize that's a little bit severe. You know, we do have a place in our church for people who haven't given all yet.

We save the better pews in the front for those who have forsaken all, but there are some pews in the middle section there for the people who, you know, they just... Tithing, we can start with tithing, you know. Jesus didn't accommodate. He said, these are the terms you want it.

You don't want it? Fine. I mean, Jesus went away. Jesus was sorrowful when He saw the man went away, but He didn't do anything to change the terms.

Because it would be more of a grief to have the man come on his own terms and be the only disciple in the group who had not embraced the terms of Jesus Christ. But our present churches, we're encouraging people to come. You don't like it this way? We'll change the music.

You don't like this? Well, we'll shorten the sermon. You don't like it this way? We'll pad the pews. You know, are you uncomfortable? We'll do whatever we can.

You like to watch TV? We'll have sound-bite Christianity in the church. We'll have a play. We'll have videos.

We'll have bands play. Why not? I mean, whatever your tastes are. Now, let me just say this.

I don't want to give the impression that I think there's something illegitimate about Christian drama or Christian music. Even, by the way, even Christian contemporary music. I know there's a variety of tastes here.

And my tastes in Christian music are probably more contemporary than those of some here. But notwithstanding my tolerance. See, when I was a teenager, I was in a Christian hard rock band.

So, I guess I haven't come all the way out of that yet. I don't play any rock music anymore. But I still, I have to say that I have seen, you know, as an evangelistic tool, you know, various kinds of music can be used.

But what I am saying is this. It's not that there's anything essentially wrong about videos or plays or music or bands. It's the mentality that if we can't get them to come to a faithful presentation of the gospel, even in the blandest clothing, then we have to dress it up in the world's clothing as much as possible.

I remember there was a band called Striper a while back. They were all Christians and they were an evangelistic band. But they were, you wouldn't, I mean, it's hard to believe

they were Christians.

And they were a very well-known band, a secular band too, but they were Christians. But they acted so worldly on stage. I mean, they wore spandex, you know, skin-tight spandex.

And they did all the writhing and all the sexual moves on stage and lustful moves. And I remember reading an interview in Newsweek or something with these people. And they said, well, we're Christians.

We want people to come to Jesus Christ. But we just know that the people we're reaching, they just wouldn't, they wouldn't come and listen to a preacher who just, you know, stand on the street corner and preach the gospel. So, we come in the garb that they are appealed to.

And I think, well, if they wouldn't listen to a preacher on the street corner preaching the gospel, then God must not be drawing them. Because people who God is drawing are hungry for God. And they get saved by some of the homiest preaching, or almost none at all sometimes.

Some of the, you know, God chooses the foolish things, confound the wise and the weak things and the ugly things sometimes, and the unentertaining things. And, you know, some of the greatest men of God have been converted by walking into some little church where, you know, there was nothing flashy about it all, but their hearts were yearning for God. And they were drawn there, and they responded.

Because when God is drawing, you don't need a spandex on the preacher. You know, it's not necessary. And I, while I do believe that more than one style of music can be used of God, and I don't believe there's just one style of music that God made up, and, you know, that was back in classical times or whatever.

I believe that music, if it's, you know, it's more the spirit about it, the attitude, the reverence and so forth of the musicians that I would be more concerned about, rather than whether the music is syncopated or something, you know. I know some people are concerned about those styles, and that's fine. Everyone has their own taste.

I would just say, I'm not saying that there's a sanctified style of music and some other unsanctified styles there might be, but it's the culture, it's the music culture I'm concerned about. A lot of Christians I know are totally opposed to Christian contemporary music or Christian rock music, and they think it's because the music itself is evil. Actually, a lot of times the music itself is quite God-glorifying.

I mean, quite edifying. Sometimes the gospel is very clear in some of the music. Most of it I haven't noticed it.

But I've heard some very pure gospel preached in some very rocky music. But, you know, my concern has not been with the style of music. My concern is with the culture of the music, because the Christian musicians who play this music, I don't care what style of music they're playing.

What I'm concerned about is the image they want, the way they act on stage, the way they whip up crowds, you know, to worship them. I mean, what we have so often is simply young people who idolize secular musicians. They get saved, and now they have Christian musicians to idolize in exactly the same way.

And that's a cultural thing that I think is corrupt in the church. And anyway, but that's what draws crowds. Well, we're not supposed to draw crowds on their terms.

We're supposed to present the gospel in Christ's terms, and that's what it's got to be. And if the sinners don't want to come, then they don't want to come. That's fine.

They don't have to come. Jesus said that no man can come to me unless my Father who sent me draw him. And if the Father's drawing him, they'll come, at least if He's drawing them powerfully.

Now, one other question I'd like to ask to those who have this secret sensitive idea of accommodating the world's culture in the church is this. Would not the world find attractive and culturally relevant to their actual needs an alternative society where there was no divorce, where there was no teen pregnancy and therefore no abortion, where there was no dishonest business dealings, where there was no teenage rebellion and generation gap in the families, where there's no criminal youth or substance abuse? Wouldn't an alternative society like that, wouldn't that be culturally relevant? I think so. But that doesn't have to have any of the trappings of the modern culture.

In fact, it's the opposite of the modern culture. The dominant culture is all those things reversed. Divorce is normative.

Teen rebellion is normative. Substance abuse is out of hand. The drug war is being, as everyone observes, being lost by the good guys.

Teen pregnancy, all that stuff. Abortions. I mean, those are the things that characterize the dominant culture.

And a Christian community would not, if it was following Jesus Christ, would not have any of those things in its midst. And while you might say, well, it's too hard, or we'd have to wait too long for that kind of a thing to reach the lost, we have to go some quicker way to get them saved and we'll just turn the church into a disco. That is easier.

That is easier than reforming whole families and whole people who are out of total pagan backgrounds and changing them entirely into saints. That doesn't happen overnight. It

doesn't even happen in a decade.

But, well, some of the things happen overnight and some happen progressively on. Certainly an idealized Christian community that really did things the way God said to do them would not materialize instantaneously. And we live in an age where we want results fast, even if we don't have to do it God's way to do it.

I personally think that if we did things God's way, we might be surprised at how successful those things would be. Now, I've been discussing one of two approaches that Christians often take to the relationship of Christianity to culture. One, as I said, is cultural accommodation.

Then there's another. It's a reaction to that. And you'll find it many times, especially in reformed churches.

I've noticed that the reformed churches have this more than most other churches. And that is to reclaim the culture for God. That is the dominant culture.

To reclaim it for God. That's not just reformed people. I think probably, I would imagine James Dobson would be in this camp.

I'm not positive. I think Chuck Colson would be in this camp. These are pretty big name guys.

I'm not being critical of them at all. I respect much of what they do and I appreciate the fact that they're there. But I think that these men would be in that philosophy.

We don't accommodate the culture. We have to reclaim the culture. We need to re-infuse the culture with biblical values.

So that the culture doesn't believe in abortion anymore. Doesn't believe that homosexuality is okay anymore. Doesn't believe that promiscuity is right.

And believes the best form of birth control and venereal disease control is abstinence. These are the agendas of the culture reclamation camp. Let's get abstinence education into the schools.

Public schools. Let's do what we can to stop pagan women from wanting to abort their babies. Let's do what we can to try to keep the influence of the homosexual community down and their political influence at a low ebb and maybe even through some degree of re-education of the culture let them realize that homosexuality is not okay.

Now those are all good things in themselves. But I think it's different than what Jesus had in mind. To illustrate this I'll give you one very notable example.

When I lived in Oregon there was several years ago a proposition, a ballot measure. I

forget, I think it was ballot measure nine if I'm not mistaken. It received, I'm sure, publicity outside the state of Oregon.

And I forget it was a few elections ago. But it was basically a very reasonable ballot measure to curtail homosexual influence in the public schools. No, it was basically just to not give homosexuals special rights.

It was basically a ballot measure to say a person will not be given special rights on the basis of their sexual preference. Now of course the liberal community publicized this as if it was to deprive homosexuals of their rights. But really the measure was basically just to prevent homosexuals from being able to define themselves as a minority that would come under certain legislation that gives special rights to minorities.

Anyway, it was a big political fight in Oregon in the year, I think it was 95 or I don't remember when it was, 94. I can't remember what year it was. But I remember thinking at the time how much, in fact, in sympathy I was with what they hoped to accomplish.

But how not in sympathy I was with their methods. Now I was way out of step with the evangelical community in Oregon on this matter. Because I mean, while I think homosexuality is perversion, and I don't mind using some of those older words for homosexuals which are politically incorrect.

I mean, I don't have any problem with that at all. To me homosexuality is the last symptom of a society that's about ready to just kind of stick its feet up and assume room temperature. And I think that where I was so different from those that were promoting this ballot measure was this.

I thought, okay, what is the result of the Christians to a large extent supporting this measure? Well, Christians have now defined themselves vis-a-vis the homosexuals as an opposing special interest political group. And that's exactly what homosexuals are going to be looking at Christians as from now on. Now if Jesus was here, if there was a homosexual community down in Portland, Oregon, what would Jesus do? Well, I don't really think he'd go down there and hammer up signs yes on nine.

I don't think he'd be down there lobbying at the state capitol saying, you know, we need to curtail the activities of homosexuals. I don't see Jesus doing anything similar to that in his own day or having any interest that even resembled that. What I think, if Jesus came today, I think he'd do something very much like what he did when he came 2,000 years ago.

He'd say, those are the homosexuals over there? I think I'll go have dinner with them. I think I'll go down there and visit them in their home. I think I'll go down there and talk to them about their lives, about their struggles, about their fears, about their need for God.

And I think he would now, as then, be criticized by the conservative religious people.

That's who criticized him back then, conservative religious people, as the friend of sinners. I don't think any evangelicals in Oregon are going to be mistaken for friends of sinners anytime soon.

And the reason is because Jesus never tried to clean up the secular culture around him or the religious culture around him, the Jewish culture. Jesus was within the Jewish culture. There was a lot of things going on.

He criticized it, but he didn't go around trying to reform and civilize unconverted sinners. He came to call people to a new kingdom and to adopt for themselves the values of that kingdom. And those who were in his kingdom, he expected to conform to his authority.

Those that did not embrace it, he didn't go and try to make them conform to it. And by the way, he could have done it on time. We're told in John chapter 6 and verse 15 that after Jesus fed the 5,000, it says that Jesus perceived that the multitude was about to take him forcibly and make him king.

Now, that would have been a position from which he could have really cleaned things up in Israel, if he was the king. And he had some groundswell of popular support, probably as many as 15,000 to 20,000 people right there. I don't think Pilate had that much support in the area.

Jesus could have probably pulled it off, especially if he had those 12 legions of angels he could call on in a pinch. I mean, if Jesus really wanted to clean up the culture around him, he was in the position to do so. And what does the Bible say he did? He says, when he saw that they were about to take him forcibly and make him king, he withdrew himself to a private place.

He sent the crowd away. He even sent the disciples away. He didn't want them to get caught up in this.

It wasn't his agenda. And it still isn't. Look at Luke chapter 13.

Luke chapter 13, the first three verses. There were present at this season some who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Now, we don't know anything about this except that summary of it right there in that one verse.

But essentially what happened, it's very, I mean, what we know of Pilate from secular history, it's very in character for him to do something like this. Apparently, some Galileans had come down to Jerusalem to worship, and they were in the temple, and they were offering sacrifices, and Pilate was having an angry day, so he sent his soldiers down just to massacre a bunch of them while they were offering animal sacrifices. Did they mind their own business? Or maybe they weren't.

Maybe they were carrying placards against Pilate. Who knows? But the thing is, he went

down there and slaughtered them, these helpless people, while they were observing their religious thing. Now, has Clinton ever done something quite like that? Now, Clinton's done some bad things.

But I haven't heard yet of him sending troops. Well, I guess Waco. Maybe he has come to think of it.

But the fact of the matter is, there has never been a blatant situation where without any pretext of, you know, legitimacy, the president just decided to send troops down to the Baptist church and massacre everyone in there in cold blood when they didn't even have weapons on them. At least the people in Waco, they could say they were shooting back. But they couldn't say that about these Galileans.

They were offering their sacrifices in the temple. He comes in and wipes them out in cold blood. Now, what do you suppose those who said this to Jesus, they came and told Jesus, what did they think he might do or think about this? He was a Galilean.

These were his countrymen. Do you suppose maybe these people who told him were hoping to get a rise out of it? Thinking maybe he'd say, as we would, enough is enough. We've taken this tyranny long enough.

We're free people. We're God's people. We're not under these pagan yoke of bondage.

We need to overthrow this tyrant and get back to the business of being a free people of God. That's no doubt what they hoped he'd say. And he, you know, if he had gotten on that bandwagon, he probably could have gotten a lot of popular support.

But when they told him about this, instead of getting politically involved or interested in revolution or whatever, his response was this. Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. What a thing to say.

What a strange response to hearing of such an atrocity. This was an atrocity by a tyrant. And Jesus says, well, you know, those people who were killed that way, they weren't any worse sinners than you.

You're going to die the same way if you don't repent. Now, there was a chance for Jesus to really show his interest in cleaning up the political system and cleaning up the culture that was around. But he just didn't show any interest at all.

In Luke chapter 12, Jesus, again, is given the opportunity to sort of pronounce on a judicial matter in this case. Someone actually comes to him asking him to do so in Luke 12, 13. It says, Then one from the crowd said to him, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

Apparently, a father had died, left an inheritance to two sons, and one took it all and ran or didn't run. He was still around, but he was getting away with it. And the guy who was ripped off says, Jesus, you know, I think my brother may listen to you.

You tell him to do what's right and give me the inheritance. I mean, this is a matter of, you know, injustice here. And Jesus said, Man, who made me a judge or an arbiter over you? And he said to him, Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.

Now, there is a strange thing. Here's a guy who's been ripped off of his rightful inheritance by his brother. There's a situation where Jesus could address a moral situation, but the brother wasn't a disciple.

The brother wasn't a follower of Christ, obviously. Of course, he wouldn't do those kinds of things. And so, Jesus just said, Well, you, the victim, you ought to deal with that covetousness issue.

You know, if you're not covetous, you won't mind being ripped off. But what's interesting is he said, Who made me an arbiter or a judge over you in these matters? I thought he was the King of kings. Didn't God make him a judge? Yes, but not over such things.

Jesus didn't want to get involved in matters of the civil magistrate. That wasn't his issue. Now, you might say, Well, that's just because he was here to die.

He wasn't here to reign and so forth at the time. But what about Paul? What's his approach to the Christian society versus the world society out there and getting involved in cleaning up the world? Well, look at 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians chapter 5. This is where Paul is addressing a case where within the Christian community, there's some sexual immorality. He doesn't tolerate even a little bit.

He says, Take that man and deliver him over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. Paul was not willing to tolerate sexual immorality in the church. But notice what he says in verse 12 of that same chapter, 1 Corinthians 5, 12.

For what have I to do with judging those who are outside? He means outside the church, those who aren't Christian. The secular culture, what do I have to do with judging them? That's not my domain. Do you not judge those who are inside? Obviously, he thinks you should.

He says, But those who are outside, God judges. Therefore, put away from yourselves that evil person. Now, there's an evil person in the church.

He says, Don't you judge the church's behavior? You ought to. You need to clean up the church. But he says, Those who are outside, that's God's problem.

They're not in the kingdom. Who am I to judge them? Now, isn't that a strange approach when you consider the average Christian's approach in America today? Neither Jesus nor Paul seemed interested at all in cleaning up the secular culture around them. I mean, there was a lot of... In Corinth, there were a thousand temple prostitutes.

In the temple of... What's her name? Diana. No, not Diana. She was in Ephesus.

Aphrodite in Corinth. A thousand temple prostitutes. If there were a thousand prostitutes in Kuski, Christians would... There would be an uproar among the Christians.

But Paul says, They're not in the church. Who am I to judge them? God's... They've got enough problems. God's going to judge them.

They're condemned already. It's in the church. Our culture among ourselves is what we have to consider.

We need to make sure we're clean. And the big irony of the modern culture war people on the conservative side is that there's a whole lot of stones being thrown at those who are outside. But inside their very churches, you've got pastors running off with their secretaries.

I mean, the church has no prophetic credibility to address the world in that manner. And it's not called to in that manner. There is a manner in which we are to address the culture and engage the culture.

But that's... I don't believe that that's the approach Jesus took. Jesus did not indicate that the church's goal or destiny is to convert the world or civilize the world. Convert the world maybe.

I don't think so. But it would at least be true to our calling. Converting the world is at least within our job description.

But civilizing or sanitizing the world is not. Remember the parable of the wheat and the tares? It's in Matthew chapter 13. Jesus said a man sowed good seed in his field and then an enemy came and sowed bad seed.

There are tares. And the angels... Or not the angels. They represent the angels.

But the servants of the good guy says, You've got tares in your field. We better go pluck them out. Don't you think we ought to pluck those people out? Those tares out? And he says, No, let's wait till the harvest.

Then we'll gather them all up. We'll sort them out then. Now, Jesus said, The one who sowed good seed is the Son of Man.

The good seed are the sons of the kingdom. The alternative society of Christians, of

Christianity. The evil seed are the children of the evil one.

That's the secular world out there. And he said, The field is the world. Sometimes people make the mistake of thinking the field is the church.

And they treat it like we're not supposed to get the tares out of the church. Because Jesus said, Just leave them there until it's all over. No, the field is not the church.

The field is the world. And he said, The children of the kingdom live in the world. And the children of the wicked one live in the world.

And they're going to grow together until the time of the harvest. And he's then going to send the angels out to separate them all up. In the meantime, what's happening? Well, some of those tares actually, I mean, if we press the analogy, some of those tares actually become wheat in the meantime.

But for the most part, you've got a good crop of wheat at the end and a good crop of tares too. They're just as tary as they used to be. The wheat doesn't try to become tares and doesn't try to imitate the tares.

The tares are an alternative to the wheat. The wheat have their own alternative society. And they live alongside in the same world in tension with the culture of the children of the wicked one.

I'd like to say positively what I think Jesus did come to do. I believe that Jesus established and the apostles perpetuated an alternative society that was to enjoy its own development independently of the dominant culture. I believe the Christian church could retain its holiness in any culture under any government.

Of course, it's a lot harder under some because sometimes we have to do it underground. Sometimes our leaders are hauled off and fed to lions and things like that. But the church can stay as... In fact, the church actually retained its holiness best under those conditions.

I don't long for those conditions. In fact, I kind of long for those things not to happen again. But the fact of the matter is no matter how bad the secular culture gets, it does not have to affect the church's mission to be faithful to the genius of Christ who presented an alternative for us.

The presence of an uncompromised alternative society, even if it never changes secular culture per se, provides an arc for those who wish to flee from the wrath to come on the dominant culture. And like righteous Noah, that culture condemns the dominant culture by its own godly testimony as its distinctives commend themselves to a larger segment of the secular populace. Such an alternative society may even elevate the conscience and values of the dominant culture, though that's not its primary objective.

It is not our primary objective to change the dominant culture. What is our primary objective is to change people from followers and lovers of themselves to being followers and lovers of Jesus Christ. Then they become part of a counterculture.

They become part of our society. And then a lot of changing is supposed to be happening. And Jesus Christ has defined it for us.

I'm going to have to close here pretty quick. We're almost out of time. Let me just define what I mean by radically Christian counterculture.

And we'll probably have to close with that. What do I mean when I talk about toward a radically Christian counterculture? Well, first of all, the word radical, two of those words kind of bother some people. The word radical and the term counterculture because we often think in both those terms is related to the hippies.

But the fact is the word radical is a much more good word than that, a much better word than that. The word radical comes from the Latin word for root. And radical means going to the root.

Radical surgery means you don't just do some cosmetic treatment on a tumor on the outside. You go to the root of it and get it out. Whatever is radically Christian, therefore, must be so because it goes to the root of Christianity.

It doesn't stop short of going back to the very root, which is Jesus Christ himself. We're rooted and grounded in him. And to be radically Christian means we don't settle for the culture of the 90s.

We don't settle for the culture of the 50s as that which the church embraces. We don't settle for the culture of the Reformation. We don't settle for the culture of the Anabaptists even or the culture of the Roman Catholics.

We don't settle for anything less than that which is the root of Christianity, which is Christ himself and his teaching and the early Christians whom he ordained to bring us that teaching. So whatever is radically Christian just means it is totally Christian, purely Christian. That which goes back to the root and doesn't take the name Christian from some later development in Christendom but defines Christian the way the Bible does, as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

That is a Christian. The disciples were first called Christians. And that's the root of Christianity.

But what do we mean by culture and especially by counterculture? Well, culture is the collective values, traditions, conventional wisdom, and the accepted practices and morals and mores of a given society or group of people. Every society has its own culture where there is a certain consensus about certain things are taboo, certain things are

normative. Some cultures embrace polygamy.

In other cultures that's taboo. Some cultures allow divorce. In other cultures that's taboo.

Some cultures, you know, the people who are the laborers are largely slaves. In other cultures the laborers are the honored ones in the culture. There's a lot of different cultural differences between cultures.

But that's what a culture is. It's the collective wisdom and traditions and so forth of a group of people. Now, a counterculture.

What is a counterculture? Well, I'd make the distinction between a counterculture and a subculture. When we talk about a subculture, we're talking about a group of people who are not really conforming to the dominant culture, but they're leaving everyone else alone. The Chinese people in San Francisco who live in Chinatown would be an example.

They're not conforming to the dominant culture of the USA. They still speak Chinese. They have their marketplace that's Chinese style.

They eat Chinese food. They maintain as much of their Chinese culture as they can, though they live in America. That's fine.

No one objects. They're welcome to do that. They're a subculture.

The Amish are a subculture. They don't assimilate into the American culture. They got their own ways.

They brought over from Germany centuries ago and they continue to keep. That's a subculture. But I'm not talking about a Christian subculture.

I'm talking about a radically Christian counterculture. Well, what's the difference between a subculture and a counterculture? The way I put it is this. A counterculture is a subculture with an attitude.

A subculture says, leave me alone. I just want to do it my way. We do it this way.

We want to keep these traditions from our culture. Is it okay with you? Okay, we won't bother you. You don't bother us.

We'll just get our little group over here. We'll be Amish or whatever. We'll just cloister in this little monastery and do things differently from those outside these walls.

That's a subculture. But a counterculture is a subculture that says, we reject the dominant culture. And we're going to do it the way we're going to do it.

And we're going to confront the dominant culture and say, you're wrong for not doing it our way. Because we are followers of another king, one Jesus. And all authority in heaven

and earth has been given to him.

And everyone, every knee is going to bow and every tongue is going to confess that he is Lord. And if you don't do it now, you're going to have to do it later. And we're telling you that the way we're living in obedience to him is the way everyone ought to live.

And we're not content to leave you in ignorance about that. Okay? Now, we're not going to make you adopt our culture. We're not going to go out and legislate that you have to be a Christian in your behavior even though you hate God.

We'd like it much better if haters of God were decent living folks and make it more comfortable for us. Probably get less persecution. You wouldn't have to worry about influences on our children so much.

But basically, it's not our task to change the dominant culture. But it is our task to confront it with light in the darkness. And so, counterculture is a subculture with an attitude.

And so, a radically Christian counterculture means that Christians as a society should have norms among themselves that are not derived by referencing what's going on in the culture around outside, but by referencing that which is radically Christian, namely Christ. And that culture lives out its own faithful to its own genius and its own calling. And it does so visibly before the world and outspokenly before the world, letting the world know that we're doing this not just because we're, you know, just because we want to be a little group, but because this is what is right.

What you're doing is wrong. And the God we serve has demands on you too. And we're here to press those demands on you.

But that demand is not that you clean up your culture. It's that you come out of that world into this world. The success of the church is not measured in how much the church can clean up the culture of the nation they're in.

It is measured in the sense of how much they have been faithful to the specific distinctives of the culture of Christianity. And in that respect, the church in America has never been very good. There was an earlier time when the church was better than it is now at influencing the dominant culture.

But the church in this country, to my knowledge, has never been very good at being faithful to all that Jesus said. And that's our first task. And so in this series, what I intend to do is address many issues relevant to what constitutes a culture.

A short list, an incomplete list would be attitudes toward women and children and aged people, family norms, social norms between the sexes, economic philosophies, philosophies about property and labor and ownership and so forth, the role of

government. Christians have a distinctive view on that. Views about recreation and entertainment and a lot of other things like that.

Those things are among the things that have to be addressed. In the meantime, a great number of sub points come up, all of them provocative in today's church. Shouldn't be.

If the church had been faithful to what Jesus called it to do, none of the things I'd have to say would be provocative, I don't think. If I were given this series in Jerusalem in the first century when the apostles were there, of course I wouldn't. I'd let them preach.

But nothing I would have to say would be provocative. But in a church's apostate and as far removed from the norms of God as that which we find ourselves in many times, everything I'm going to have to say is going to be provocative. It's the most controversial series I've ever taught.

You thought my series on some assembly required was provocative. This is more so because it's even more intrusive. This is the series where the preacher stops preaching and goes to meddling.

There's no validity in leaving any stone unturned because the church has bought the assumptions of our culture in almost every area, except a few very gross things. We need to go back and find out what God said. What early Christians understood.