

In The World But Not Of The World

Joe Slater

Jesus said His disciples were “in the world” but “not of the world” (John 17:11, 16). We certainly are located in the world; but we are not to “be conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2). Being different from the world is neither popular nor easy. “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19).

How should you handle being different from the world? When those around you are using vulgar language, dressing immodestly, smoking, drinking, dancing, and otherwise behaving sinfully, what should you do? Compromise is not an option. “Go along and get along” might be pragmatic politics, but it is pathetic Christianity. Relative to the sinful world, disciples of Jesus are non-conformists. Rather, we are to “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*” (Romans 12:2).

Sometimes you need to confront and rebuke sin boldly. In Athens (Acts 17) Paul told the philosophers plainly that their idolatry was contrary to truth and sound reasoning, and that they needed to repent. A few people listened; most turned away. When someone uses God’s name disrespectfully, you have every right to express your displeasure. If the person respects you, perhaps he will clean up his language (at least when he is around you). If not, he may deliberately blaspheme just to irritate you. In the latter case, your continued objection is probably counterproductive. “Do not . . . cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces” (Matthew 7:6).

In some cases, you simply need to leave. When the people around you are telling dirty jokes, is there anything that says you must stay and listen? Removing yourself from the situation might embolden others to do the same. Example speaks volumes. In cases where you cannot leave (e.g. at work, or on an airplane), pray and endure.

In all cases, avoid being self-righteous. Acknowledge your own sins and shortcomings. Remember to love and pray for those whose behavior is worldly. Jesus died for them just as He did for you. “Hate the sin, love the sinner.” That saying is worn out because it is so true! Don’t just complain about bad behavior; show them the right way.

Christians are to be different from the world. Question: By observing you, can people tell the difference?

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Evolution

Evolution as a theory
Doesn’t make a lot of sense
Then again, some “scientists”
Think Christian folks are kinda dense.
They claim creation couldn’t happen;
“Just to incredible,” they say.
So Darwin wrote for evolution;
Now it’s the “scientific” way.
Fairy tales turn frogs to princes;
One kiss does the trick – how silly!
A billion years replace the kiss,
And that is evolution – really!
Evolution or Creation?
Reason for yourself, my friend!
Either God Almighty made you,
Or from apes you did descend.

--Joe Slater

Ways I Deepen My Faith (when I read Revelation)

I love the church more honestly (chapters 2 and 3).

I love God’s idea called *the church!* When I read books like Ephesians and Acts, I catch God’s vision for this vibrant, victorious community. I imagine a band of believers ablaze with love for Jesus, preaching the good news in the marketplace, embracing the sick and shameful with Christ’s love, digging deeply into Scripture together. To be a part of a body like that—what a glorious joy! Sign me up!

But then I go to church and find people who sometimes care more about carpet color than compassion, who hold their money too tightly, who bicker and quarrel and know their *TV Guide* better than their Bible. I saw a book entitled *Church: Why Bother?* and when I see congregations shamed by immoral scandal or dulled by years of the same routine, I can get frustrated and feel like giving up on the church.

But not if I read Revelation. All churches have fallen short of the glory of God, and nowhere is that clearer than in Revelation 2 and 3. These churches are marked by immorality, sloppy teaching, apathy, and complacency. The churches are a mess—just like the ones I know. As my friend Mark Moore says, “We say we want to be the New Testament church. Congratulations, we made it!”

But the good news is, Jesus still loves these churches. It’s tough love, to be sure. In these seven letters, Jesus challenges and corrects and confronts—moving them to maturity. But it’s love nonetheless. “The Lord disciplines the one he loves” (Hebrews 12:6). And with the confrontation is commendation. For each church except Laodicea, he affirms the good he sees mixed in with the bad. He loves these churches not because they’re perfect, but because they’re his.

That’s the essence of true love. I heard about a girl who said, as she was breaking up with her boyfriend, “I will always cherish the initial misconception I had about you.” *Ouch!* Real love doesn’t happen in fantasy; it happens in reality. You can’t love someone for who you wish they were; you must love them as they actually are, flaws and all. That’s why Dietrich Bonhoeffer said true Christian community begins with disillusionment. You aren’t really loving your Christian brothers until they’ve disappointed you and you choose to stick by them anyway. That’s what Jesus does for the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, and when I read these chapters, I too am inspired to love the church more honestly.

--Matt Proctor (via *Christian Standard*)