

## **The Church Versus the World**

Scripture: James 4:4, Luke 6:26, John 7:7, John 15:18-19

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### **John MacArthur**

Why do evangelicals try so desperately to court the world's favor? Churches plan their worship services to cater to the "unchurched." Christian performers ape every worldly fad in music and entertainment. Preachers are terrified that the offense of the gospel might turn someone against them, so they deliberately omit the parts of the message the world might not approve of.

Evangelicalism seems to have been hijacked by legions of carnal spin-doctors, who are trying their best to convince the world that the church can be just as inclusive, pluralistic, and broad-minded as the most politically-correct worldling.

The quest for the world's approval is nothing less than spiritual harlotry. In fact, that is precisely the imagery the apostle James used to describe it. He wrote: "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

There is and always has been a fundamental, irreconcilable incompatibility between the church and the world. Christian thought is out of harmony with all the world's philosophies. Genuine faith in Christ entails a denial of every worldly value. Biblical truth contradicts all the world's religions. Christianity itself is therefore antithetical to virtually everything this world admires.

Jesus told His disciples, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. 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 15:18-19).

Notice that our Lord considered it a given that the world would despise the church. Far from teaching His disciples to try to win the world's favor by reinventing the gospel to suit worldly preferences, Jesus expressly warned that the quest for worldly accolades is a characteristic of false prophets: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26).

He further explained: "The world . . . hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil" (John 7:7). In other words, the world's contempt for Christianity stems from moral, not intellectual, motives: "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to

the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:19-20). That is why no matter how dramatically worldly opinion might vary, Christian truth will never be popular with the world.

Yet in virtually every era of church history there have been people in the church who are convinced that the best way to win the world is by catering to worldly tastes. Such an approach has always been to the detriment of the gospel message. The only times the church has made any significant impact on the world are when the people of God have stood firm, refused to compromise, and boldly proclaimed the truth despite the world's hostility. When Christians have shrunk away from the task of confronting popular worldly delusions with unpopular biblical truths, the church has invariably lost influence and impotently blended into the world. Both Scripture and history attest to that fact.

And the Christian message simply *cannot* be twisted to conform to the vicissitudes of worldly opinion. Biblical truth is fixed and constant, not subject to change or adaptation. Worldly opinion, on the other hand, is in constant flux. The various fads and philosophies that dominate the world change radically and regularly from generation to generation. The only thing that remains constant is the world's hatred of Christ and His gospel.

In all likelihood, the world will not long embrace whatever ideology is in vogue this year. If the pattern of history is any indicator, by the time our great grandchildren become adults, worldly opinion will be dominated by a completely new system of belief and a whole different set of values. Tomorrow's generation will renounce all of today's fads and philosophies. But one thing will remain unchanged: until the Lord Himself returns and establishes His kingdom on earth, whatever ideology gains popularity in the world will be as hostile to biblical truth as all its predecessors have been.

Adapted from John MacArthur's book, *Why One Way?*

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