

Culture and the Christian Life

(Conformity or Counteraction?)

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Someone once remarked:

“Theologians and philosophers have been saying for a century that God is dead, but what we confront now is the possibility that man is dead, transformed into a thing, a producer, a consumer, an idolater of other things.”

This statement reflects how man is bound to the culture of his own day and has become an idolater of the things in this world. Is the Bible relevant to Christianity in the 21st century when it comes to teaching us about our present culture and the Christian’s response to this culture? I say today with much assurance that the Bible is totally up to date when it comes to informing the Christian how to deal with the tide of cultural changes in our society. The Scriptures give very clear instruction about Christians living within their cultural settings in the 21st century.

1 John 2:15-17 is a key verse that deals with the effects that the world system has upon our lives in the present culture in which we live. Dear friend, the world system has not changed. It is still the same as it tries to rule our Christian hearts and lives. What does this text say? “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

The world is a wicked system that is headed up by its maker who is the devil. It is a cultural system of thoughts, works, places, values, philosophies, music, money, trends, styles and influences that runs contrary to God and His will for our lives (see 2:17b – the world is in contrast to the will of God). These are some of the many “things that are in the world.” In actuality, the world with its permeating culture is

that which steals a person's love and devotion away from the Lord. This is because when a Christian loves the world the "love of the Father is not in him" (vs. 15). And the Bible also says that loving the world's cultural norms, ("the things that are in the world") whatever they might be, takes us away from doing what we need to be doing – "the will of God" (vs. 17). So the world robs us of loving God and doing God's will. Thus, the world is an organized cultural system, made up of a set of attitudes, ideas, thoughts, works, values, people, activities, music, money, trends, styles, influences, places, philosophies and purposes that are opposed to God and which takes us away from loving God supremely and following God's will completely.

Worldliness is anything within a given cultural setting that will keep us from loving God, as we ought to love him. It is anything within the present culture that keeps us from doing the will of God, as we ought to do it. Loving the Father supremely and doing the Father's will are the two tests to consider what might be worldly in our own lives. The Bible also tells us that we are not to conform to the present cultural world system, which is against God. We are told to refrain from molding or patterning our lives after the world's culture.

Romans 12:2 says:

"And be not conformed (molded) to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

1 Peter 1:14 also says:

"As obedient children, not fashioning (molding) yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance."

The Bible gives very clear instruction about our need as Christians to not mold or pattern our lives after the world of culture in which we live. But how can Christians really know when they pattern their lives after the world's culture or system and when they are not molding their personal lives after the world system? Obviously we must live, work and function in the world and maintain contact with the things of this world in our everyday living. We must use many of the world's devices (cars, money, clothing) and we will also be introduced to the world's philosophies and ways of thinking in life which run contrary to

loving God and doing His will. As we live, move and breath we all know too well that we must face the world's manifold culture in the everyday norm of living.

The world's culture is seen on billboard advertisements and in magazines. It is seen in the work force, malls and grocery stores where we go shopping. Certainly we must function in the midst of this world's culture. But the believer must understand that he is never to mold or pattern his life after the world system or present day cultural standards whether those things are sinful by design or whether they are not sinful in and of themselves. Whenever the Christian allows the sins and the new fads of a culture to override and rule his life, it's then that he will find himself drifting from God's love and God's will. The old axiom is still true: "We live in the world but are not of the world." This means that we must dwell and function in this world without becoming contaminated by the cultural system of the 21st century.

When must we break ties with the world's culture and not pattern our lives after its innovative ways?

- We cannot follow the culture when the culture contradicts the clear commands of Scripture (lying, cheating, stealing, idolatry, fornication, adultery, drinking alcohol, etc. - Proverbs 6:16-19, 23:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Exodus 20:1-16).
- We cannot follow the culture when the culture is clearly wrong and mimics the "such like" works of the flesh (dancing, promiscuous dating, smut books, etc. - Gal. 5:19-21).
- We cannot follow the culture when the cultural activities promote a greedy display of covetousness (greedy game shows on TV, lottery playing, work without family time - Luke 12:15; Eph. 5:3; Hebrews 13:5).
- We cannot follow the culture when the culture fails to demonstrate the difference between the holy and unholy (Christian Rock Music, Christian Psychology, immodest dress, various TV shows, etc. - Leviticus 10:10-11).

- We cannot follow the culture when we must directly or indirectly fellowship with unbelievers in their settings of life that glorify sin, uncleanness and false doctrine (Movie Theaters, glorified bars, ecumenical church gatherings (1 Cor. 10:20; 2 Cor. 6:17).
- We cannot follow the culture when culture ignores the timeless principles between righteousness and unrighteousness or light and darkness (2 Cor. 6:14).
- We cannot follow the culture when the culture brings us under its bondage and enslaves us to itself (drugs, cigarettes, lustful books - 1 Cor. 6:12, 19).
- We cannot follow the culture when our actions or conduct effects our thought life in an adverse way (reading wrong books, watching wrong TV shows, etc. - Philippians 4:8).
- We cannot follow the culture when our actions or conduct hurts our personal testimony as a Christian (Ephesians 5:8; 1 Timothy 4:12; Matthew 5:14-16).
- We cannot follow the culture by having close friendships that are not Christian and which get us to fellowship with the wrong crowd, questionable practices and keep us from serving the Lord (I Corinthians 15:32-33; 2 Cor. 6:14-17; Psalm 119:63).
- We cannot follow the culture when the culture promotes immodesty, vulgarity and crudeness in overall lifestyle (I Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3; Eph. 5:29).
- We cannot follow the culture when the culture fails to distinguish between the sexes within humanity (same haircut styles, feminine jewelry on men, unisex philosophy - 1 Corinthians 11:14-15; Deuteronomy 22:5).
- We cannot conform to the culture when the culture disregards the traditional roles of the family, family values and divine order (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-23; 1 Tim. 5:14; Titus 2:5).

- We cannot follow the culture that leads us to experience love for the world (new home, new car, sports, hobbies, cigarettes, social drinking, lewd magazines, etc) above Christ and His eternal will (1 John 2:15-17).
- We cannot follow the culture when it represents darkness and Satan's kingdom (Ephesians 5:8; Romans 13:12; 1 Peter 2:9 – Halloween, cards, Rock Music, etc.).
- We cannot follow the culture when it attempts to revert to heathenistic living practiced by pagan people without God (excess body piercing, pagan music, etc. - Jeremiah 10:2-3; Matt. 6:7).
- We cannot follow the culture when it promotes and leads to excesses in living instead of moderation (excess body piercing, excess jewelry, make-up, eating; drunkenness - 1 Peter 3:3-4; 1 Peter 4:3-4; Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:23 – “temperance”).
- We cannot follow the culture when it attempts to rebel against governmental authority in society and the established decency and order designed for the local church ministry (Romans 13:1-4; 1 Cor. 14:33, 40).
- We cannot follow the culture when it gives humanistic answers for living the Christian life (pop-psychology, self-esteem theology - 2 Peter 1:3-4; Luke 14:26).
- We cannot follow the culture that glorifies pragmatism (results determine what is right and true), relativism (no truth or absolutes) and existentialism (freedom to experience personal fulfillment without doctrinal direction) which are promoted to accomplish certain goals (1 Timothy 6:20; Romans 3:8).
- We cannot follow the culture wanting to do every new thing in order to be like other people (fleshly reason), impress others or be better than others (prideful reason) and follow their ways (Matt. 6:8 “be not like them” – 1 John 2:15-17 – “lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes & pride of life).

Roy B. Zuck has this to say about culture and the Bible:

“When the Bible clearly gives a command and nowhere else nullifies that command, it must be accepted as the revealed will of God and a mandate to mold our personal and group behavior (our culture) in the form of this instruction. This means that the bible is its own authority, including the authority to set limits on which practices are culture-bound and which ones are not.”

When the Bible talks about a cultural practice such as the typical cleansing among the people of the Old Testament, foot-washing and veiling, we must then apply the timeless principle behind the cultural teachings. These are the principles such as holy living (typical cleansing in O.T. – Ex. 19:10), a servant’s heart and life (foot-washing – John 13) and veiling (submission within the marriage relationship – 1 Cor. 11). In other words, we must always be ready and willing to see the eternal principle found in the cultural command.

Then too, we must understand that as we face our present day culture, we must be ready to unveil God’s timeless principles and lessons that may counteract the culture in which we live. These are the lessons that can be seen throughout all of His Word as we seek to live a holy life in the present culture of our own day (Romans 15:4). As Zuck says, we must “mold our personal and group behavior (our culture) in the form of this instruction.” This means that our culture should not overthrow timeless commands and principles found in God’s Word or else the present day culture will be intrinsically wrong and worldly in nature.

Cal Thomas once said:

“There’s great opportunity for believers to be creators of antidotes for the cultural virus that infects us. Biblical values work!”

Culture has a way of igniting the fire of the old nature that is still smoldering within every Christian.

1 John 2:16 once again says:

“For all that is in the world (world culture), the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

The basic trinity of evil that makes up the things in this world system is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. In other words, these are the underlying or base things that take us away from God's love and God's will for our personal lives. Behind every culturally accepted thing in our society ("the things of the world" – vs. 15) whether it is TV's, cars, magazines, sports, hobbies, new styles of talk and clothing is the seed potential for the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. In other words, these are the three basic evils, which can be spawned in our hearts and lives as we view and interact with the things of this culture. And it's this same evil trinity that is behind every worldly sin that we do. They are working behind the stages and set the stage for every worldly sin to take place in our lives.

Lusts or evil cravings are spawned from the old nature ("the flesh") and come from within ("lust of the flesh"). But many times the inward is ignited through the outward eyegate by what we see and look at in life ("lust of the eyes"). Furthermore, pride is man boasting of what he has and does ("pride of life). When pride is manifested in people it seeks to get others to notice them. It is that sin that man so easily commits as he tries to fit into society. This is the basic trinity of evil that causes us to mold or pattern our lives after the world system and culture of our own day. All the things in this world system that lead us astray have their roots in these three evils.

There are many "things that are in the world" which can become the love of our lives instead of loving Christ supremely. The things in this world overtake our love life with the Lord and become like idols to our lives. John seems to be saying that we should not make an idol out of anything. When we do it becomes worldly to our own personal lives. Every detailed thing within the culture ("the things in the world" – 1 John 2:15) that take us away from loving God and doing God's will, occurs when we begin to create lust for these things through the flesh and the eyegate and develop pride in our hearts because of them.

The fact of the matter is this. We must learn to primarily counteract present day culture using the Bible as our final guide and authority or else we will become worldly by attempting to mimic the errors, lifestyle, sins and trends of a perverted society. The devil is at work like never before selling his popular culture to everyone who will

watch and listen. Many Christians are mesmerized by the culture and are taken in by every new thing that comes down the pike. Cultural relativism has taken Christians to the point where they prefer to talk about preferences and personal tastes instead of dealing with the need for personal separation from the cultural norms that go against the spiritual grain of the Scriptures. Bible believing Christians who have the authoritative standard of the Word of God must cling to the timeless commands and principles given in the Scripture and seek to counteract cultural changes that do not line up with the unchanging principles of the Bible.

On the other hand, we must not come to the conclusion that every new cultural dress, style, haircut, lawnmower or new car is worldly or wrong merely because it is new. Just because we decide to buy a new style of car does not make us worldly unless we are doing it for self-centered fleshly reasons. Just because we choose to wear a new style of clothing does not make us worldly unless we are doing it for fleshly or prideful reasons. Let's consider the new car that you are thinking about buying?

- When you see the red car do you lose yourself in lust over the vehicle (“lust of the eyes”)?
- Are you infatuated with the vehicle to the point that you are lusting for it (“lust of the flesh”)?
- Do you want to buy this new car to keep up with the Jones family down the street or fit into the accepted norm of society (“pride of life”)?
- Do you want to impress others with this new car (“pride of life”)?

These are the types of questions we should ask so that the modern trends and fads of the world do not become sinful to our own personal lives.

Why do many Christians want to engage in certain activities or reflect the popular culture of the day even if it is something that is not morally wrong or sinful?

- Is it because they see what others are doing and as a result want to fit into the overall scheme of things and find self-centered

fulfillment in having those same things and being like others (“lust of the eyes”)?

- Is it because they have a controlling and almost addictive desire to be like others and fit into the mold of the crowd (“lust of the flesh”)?
- Is it because they want to promote or elevate themselves like the rest of society and be seen as someone who is like everyone else (“pride of life”)?

We must learn to teach our young people this principle of non-conformity to the world as they go to school and are tempted to “fit in” with the crowd in order to be like everyone else. We must ask them this basic question:

“Why are you trying to fit in with the crowd and conform to the cultural standard?”

- Is it simply because of peer pressure to become like others so that you will not be frowned upon as a Christian (“evil companionships corrupt good morals” - 1 Cor. 15:33)? If this is so, then you are demonstrating by your cultural actions of conformity that you don’t want to be known as a Christian (see John 19:38). This means that you do not want to boldly serve and live for the Lord because of your fear of cultural reprisal and mockery.
- Is it because what you see in the culture creates an overwhelming desire in your heart to have it so that you might feel fulfilled in life by the physical or material things (“lust of the eyes”)?
- Is it because of your “fleshly” or self-centered covetous desire to constantly live for new things and the acceptance of others by having their similar dress, talk and actions (“lust of the flesh”)?
- Is it because you want to excel, show off and be like the others or remain one step above the rest (“pride of life”)?

We must understand that something becomes worldly to our personal lives when we want to do it for fleshly reasons, which are self-centered. Some of these fleshly reasons to conform to the world system might be to rebel against God ordained patterns that demand

a distinction between the sexes or self-control over our bodies and excess living (Deut. 22:5; Gal. 5:23; Eph. 5:18; 1 Peter 4:3-4). Another fleshly reason for cultural conformity is to blend into the present day society so that others will not notice that we are Christians. There may also be the self-centered fleshly reason of copying every new style in order to greedily have what others possess. These fleshly desires might also include the overwhelming drive to experience social acceptance with the world of other people to the point that we love to please others more than Christ.

But is it really wrong when Christians want to be like everybody else or be socially and culturally accepted by the majority of people? The answer to this question must obviously be a resounding, "Yes!" The overwhelming and all consuming desire to be like everyone else (the crowd) is something that rules Christian hearts and lives and becomes a self-centered fleshly thing. It becomes like a powerful drug that enslaves people. Paul said that nothing should enslave us within the culture.

1 Corinthians 6:12 says:

"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power (authority) of any."

It's no secret that many Christian lives are obsessed with being like everyone else. They want to hang with the crowd by adopting their fleshly music, fads and funky ways. This is why we have such an earthly centered way of living being practiced among many present day Christian lives. Christians are ready to participate in any offbeat, odd, or quirky appearance and style of clothing and such like. And all of this is done in the name of cultural conformity. And conformity is exactly what it is and this is what the Bible condemns.

It's amazing how some new practice or item can attract the self-centered and covetous spirit in Christians and begin to rule their hearts. In return we see how many believers, out of sheer lust or the pride of wanting acceptance, become obsessed with having the same things or doing the same things that everyone else is practicing in society. Becoming like everyone else (world conformity) becomes an addictive force and pattern in their lives. They simply want to copy the

system in order to keep up with others (lust of the flesh) and lift themselves up like others (pride of life).

It's also important to understand that people who conform to the world also fall into the sin of pride – “the pride of life.” They do this by possessing the underlying motive of promoting themselves or lifting themselves up by the way that they dress, act and look. They have the idea that they might be someone of importance if they mimic others and act like them. Also, Christians can dress a certain way in order to try and draw attention to themselves for various reasons. Of course, all of this is done in the name of pride.

We must beware that we do not attempt to knowingly draw attention to ourselves by our looks and dress. This is nothing more than the sin of pride, which is practiced today in our own cultural environment. All of us can become guilty of this sin if we do not guard our hearts. We can become a slave to fashion and current trends to the point that we must have what everyone else has in order to be accepted. This becomes a matter of pride in our heart and peer pressure can drive us to the place of pride.

A strong desire to be like everyone else (world conformity) also creates a type of self-love which Jesus strongly condemns (Luke 14:26). It ultimately will stir up a love for self and self-acceptance in the world culture above a love for the Father (1 John 2:15). It develops into such a ruling element in Christian lives that it becomes more important for the Christian to blend with the culture than to love the Father and do His will.

When Christians develop this “culture fever” of trying to constantly change styles, listen to the same music as the world and attempt to talk and act like the culture, they begin to walk down the road trying to serve two masters. They find their lives being pulled away from their pursuit of God and His will for their lives as they seek to be like everyone else and conform to the world system. Jesus said that we cannot serve God and mammon or those things of the world or culture in which we live (Matt. 6:24).

We can think back upon the “hippie scene” and then the “punk rock scene” and today the extensive body piercing that is going on even

as I write. These cultural acts are constantly trying to break standard norms based on Biblical values of the family, looks, and male and female designs. People are attempting to mesh together some kind of rebellious order against traditionally based Biblical values. They seek to band together in order to pursue their fleshly goals that ignore Scriptural norms and promote themselves (call attention to themselves by their looks and dress) as someone who is going to be different than others in society (“pride of life”).

These types of movements actually try to establish a sub-culture within the established normal culture of a society. A sub-culture happens when a group of people having similar social, economic, ethnic or other traits begin to mark themselves out as being distinct from the rest of society and try to distinguish themselves from the normal pattern within the same culture or society.

These types of actions will many times become a work of the flesh and pride as people desire to promote and elevate themselves in society by being different. They are movements that seek to disrupt normality and promote unusual and even ghastly designs, which resemble rebellion against order and natural decency within a society. Of course, these types of cultural diversities are normally wrong simply because they ignore the ordained patterns established by God for the human race (distinction among the sexes, rebellion against government) and promote excesses and abnormalities in the lives of people.

But it's important to realize that even though something within the changing cultural pattern is not evil in itself, it can become personally sinful and worldly to our lives. This occurs when we allow the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life to overtake our thoughts and hearts in connection with the things of this world. Beware of becoming trendy just to be trendy. You will find yourself becoming worldly in your heart and life through lust and pride.

We must explain to our young people about the command to not “conform” (Romans 12:2) to the world's culture (music, dress, looks, etc.) and the “spirit” of this world (1 Cor. 2:12 – the philosophies and thinking of the world) which clearly goes against the moral standards of decency and separated standards established in the Word of God.

But at the same time we must also explain to our young people that something new in the culture, which is not necessarily wrong, can also become worldly to our personal lives if we feel we must do it to be noticed or become someone who fits into society. This is doing something for fleshly and prideful reasons.

As we have already discussed, the world system deals with the “lust of the flesh” and the “lust of the eyes” which involves following unwholesome desires through the flesh and eye gate. The system of the world also deals with the “pride of life” which is the overwhelming desire to be better than others and promote oneself by mimicking the trends of the day. Beware of allowing society to pressure your life into conforming to the new fads and standards for the self-centered fleshly reasons of social acceptance and self-glorification (pride) – wanting to promote yourself with others. The hidden lust and pride of the world is behind most actions today as people attempt to conform to the culture for social acceptance and avoid being a so-called misfit Christian.

There is something innocent and normal about three teenage girls wanting to buy the same pair of black shoes or notebooks for school. But there is something worldly about those same three girls wanting to buy those shoes or notebooks for covetous reasons and to feel accepted by the vast majority of the crowd. There is something worldly about these girls wanting the same shoes and notebooks in order to call attention to themselves and feel proud that they are like the rest of the people in the world.

Of course, there is a difference between *liking* something and *lusting* after something. Happy he is who knows the difference and finds the balance! We must learn to balance our Christian living within the cultural setting in which we all live. Nevertheless, we become molded to the world when we lust after and practice those things that the Bible clearly forbids. We become like the world when we try to mimic societal changes for the self-centered fleshly reasons of living for material gain, new things and the acceptance of other people through imitating their talk and dress. We become like the world when we allow pride to swell up in our hearts. This is done through drawing attention to ourselves or desiring to be just as good if not better than everyone else. The world can be very subtle. Beware of conforming

to its wishes. The believer does not have to change with every new cultural product or gadget that comes on the market.

This is why separated Christian schools and colleges eliminate the students from mimicking many new styles of haircuts and clothing. By eliminating these things, they are demonstrating that as a school they can declare a stand against trying to copy the culture of the world for fleshly reasons and present the testimony that as a school they are not going to follow the dictates of the world's dress and philosophies in any way or fashion. It's not that all of the new styles are necessarily wrong, but a separated school has a testimony to uphold for the sake of remaining a school that will not bend to the shifting trends of society. Therefore, standards are set for students to keep so that the school might teach the students to discipline their lives and not have to conform to every cultural change in society.

This discipline will help the students to learn that cultural conformity must not be something that overtakes our hearts and lives which in return creates worldliness in our day to day living. Many schools today who are totally sold out to the worldly and relativistic spirit of New Evangelicalism are actually dropping all their standards for their students. Their claim is that students must learn to think for themselves and make decisions on their own. But in doing this they have forgotten one thing. Students are still students! Students are there to learn spiritual discipline. And a school can instill or ingrain within the lives of students the teaching that as Christians they need to discipline their lives from those things in culture, whether sinful or not sinful, which can captivate or control their lives and keep them from doing God's will.

Anything in the world and changing culture of our day can become worldly to us if we violate the clear commands of Scriptures and disobey God's timeless commands and principles. Furthermore, anything can become worldly to our lives if we allow it to become something of self-centered lust and pride in our hearts. Cars, cards, houses, sports, hobbies, dating, clothing styles, Christian Rock Music, long hair on men, short hair on women, Halloween, cigarettes, overeating, dirty magazines and books can all be worldly to our hearts and lives. Some of these things are sinful by their design and God's Word clearly tells us to separate from them on the basis of

holiness and righteousness. Other things are not sinful or dirty in themselves but they can become personally sinful to our own lives when we allow them to rule our hearts and create lust and pride inside of us. Even liver and onions can become worldly to our lives if we are addicted to it and find ourselves needing to eat liver and onions four nights out of the week! “Love not the world” (1 John 2:15). You may say, “Well, I have no problem not loving liver and onions.”

- But do you have a problem with needing to stay in style and keep up with the rest of the young people at school?
- Do you lust for new clothing just to keep up with the styles and keep a chip of pride on your shoulder?
- Do you try to call attention to yourself by the way you dress and look?
- Do you find yourself needing to pierce your body in heathenistic and extreme fashions in order to identify with the crowd and culture in your school?
- Do you feel the pressure to conform to the ways of a group of people who are not Christians so that you will not be looked down upon as a person who is a Christian?
- Must you shy away from other Christians at school or work in order to show that you want to fit in with the majority of the crowd and adopt their lifestyles?
- Do you find yourself going along with many things that others are doing and blending into the crowd simply because of group pressure?
- Do you catch yourself attempting to talk like others and impress others by what you do and refuse to do?
- Do you experience the need to attend certain places in order to “feel” like you can fit into society?
- Do you sing solos in church or serve the Lord just to be noticed and praised for what you do?
- Do you want to be silent and subtle about social issues of separation and never deal with them in your persona life?
- Do you shy away from separated teaching that might infringe on your wishes and desires to do as you please?
- Is your heart closed to hearing the truth about separation?

If you find yourself answering many of these questions with a “yes” then you are probably a worldly Christian wanting to conform to the world’s standards and ways for self-centered reasons (“lust of the flesh”) and self-glorification (“pride of life”). The overwhelming desire to be like present-day society can eventually overcome a person’s heart to such a degree that they attempt to mimic the culture in other areas that are not decent and proper for Christian living (Eph. 5:4 – “which are not convenient”).

If I find myself conforming to a style such as long hair on men and short hair on women, then it becomes worldly to me because I violate Scriptural principles while trying to conform to the culture of the day (1 Cor. 11:14-15). Furthermore, I can very easily change my looks or lifestyle in some measure so that I might become more acceptable to society and want the praise of men. This becomes a form of both self-centered living (“lust of the flesh”) and self-glorification (“pride of life”). The old nature seeks the praise of men.

John 12:43 says:

“For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

This is at the heart of all worldliness today and compromise with the world. Young people and those on the job are under great pressure to seek the praise of men instead of the praise of God. If we are not careful we can become like the Pharisees of Christ’s day who for fleshly and prideful reasons wanted men to see them perform their religious traditions. They wanted to be noticed by others by what they did and practiced in their lives. This is nothing more than the root or core of worldliness.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:5:

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”

Our desire should be to have God’s praise instead of allowing our lives to be molded to the world culture in order to have the praise of men. We should not seek to promote or call attention to our lives in

any way to receive the praise of men. Romans 2:29 reminds us as Christians whose praise we should seek when it says:

“... whose praise is not of men, but of God.”

Keith Miller hit the nail on the head when he said:

“I think we are unreal about ourselves, even as Christians, because we are afraid that if people find out what we are actually like inside, behind the mask, find out that we really don't honestly want to be with them socially as much as we imply, they will not accept us and therefore we won't be able to fulfill our self-centered needs through our associations with them.”

The point is this. When I look around and attempt to pattern my life after the world for the fleshly reason to boost my self-centered needs and for the prideful reason to elevate my position and status, it's then that these activities become the “lust of the eyes,” “the lust of the flesh” and the “pride of life” in my own personal life. Alas, I have given into the evil trinity once again (1 John 2:15-17).

There is great pressure today to become culturally accepted in our society. This is why Christians in the culture are becoming molded to the culture! They want to “fit in” to society and feel at home in the world. But we must remember as Christians that this world is not our home. We are sojourners and pilgrims just passing through (Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:10,16). We used to sing, “This world is not my home; I'm just a passing through!” Many Christian have forgotten this Biblical truth. Furthermore, we must reflect upon the life of Jesus Christ who once walked in the culture of His own day. It's very clear that Jesus was not concerned about fitting into the cultural norms and changes that He witnessed while He walked upon this earth.

To be sure, Jesus counteracted the wicked culture of His day (Matt. 21:12-13). But at the same time, Jesus was not obsessed with being culturally relevant, up to date, and accepted by every individual. He was concerned with the Father's will and pleasing the Father (John 8:29). Jesus Christ was not concerned about assimilating with the culture of His own day nor would He allow any fleshly desires or pride to overtake Him that would lead to molding Himself to the world. Jesus is our greatest example of someone who consistently decided

to not conform to the pattern of the world through fleshly and prideful reasons (Hebrews 7:26). Jesus refused to succumb to the temptations of the devil who tried to tempt Him to lust after the fleshly physical things of this world and possess the pride of life within His own heart (see Matthew 4:1-11).

In this temptation, the devil used the basic trinity of evil that is behind all cultural conformity – the lust of the eyes (Matt. 4:8 – “sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world”), the lust of the flesh (Matt. 4:3 – “command that these stones be made bread”) and the pride of life (Matt. 4:6 “cast thyself down” and vs. 8 “sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them”). As we have seen, these are the three base components of the world system (1 John 2:16).

It's these three archenemies that come from the realm of the old nature. The devil seeks to stimulate the old nature by using the “things that are in the world” to attract our attention (1 John 2:15). You will remember that Achan “saw” the goods that God had forbidden the children of Israel to have and he then coveted them (see Joshua 7:20-21). David also “saw” Bathsheba bathing and coveted her for himself (Samuel 11:2).

In other words, Satan uses the modern trends, fads, styles, books, magazines, tobacco, drugs, money, material things, cars, homes, ideas, philosophies, opposite sex and many other things that are in this world as a way to excite or stimulate the old nature. This temptation comes so the Christian will allow the things of this world to dominate their lives. Satan is a master at using the worldly culture, whatever it might be, to create fleshly desires and pride within our hearts. The devil wants us to mold our lives and revolve our thinking around the system that is against God and which keeps us from loving God supremely and following His will completely.

The point is this. Jesus did not conform to the culture of His own day. Jesus kept saying, “It is written.” He counteracted the culture. He was not concerned about fitting into the mold of society or accommodating the cultural trends and ways of living. Rather, Jesus sought to do the Father's will instead of being overcome with the world culture by a display of fleshly desires and pride.

Gordon MacDonald said:

“I think we need to be constantly reminded that Jesus, by the standards of cultural success models, was a miserable failure.”

I remember back in the 70's, when as a teen, leisure suits were the “in thing.” The youth, as well as other men, would wear leisure suits to church. Today as I write double-breasted suits are in and we see many wearing these suits to church. Nobody knows what it might be next year at this same time. Maybe leisure suits will come back in style. I hope not! But is it really worldly to wear these styles of clothing to church? Is it worldly to wear clothing that is in fashion? The answer is yes and no. It's “yes” if you are constantly changing your wardrobe and wearing this kind of suit or new clothing to just be like everyone else and conform to a standard set by society. The answer is “yes” if you copy the immodest patterns of the world. But the answer might also be “no” if you are wearing a new style of clothing that is not indecent and when there are no fleshly or carnal reasons for you doing so.

It's not wrong for a Christian to be in style. It's probably wise that a Christian does not seek to get every new style that comes into the cultural scene nor is it wise to be a century behind in your clothing. Both extremes can cater to the flesh and become something of pride in our hearts. On the one hand, some believers might be proud that they are like everyone else and for fleshly reasons boost themselves into the limelight with every changing fad and style. But some Christians who title themselves as “ultra conservatives” or “non-conformists” may also be forming pride in their hearts by staying ten years behind everyone else in dress and style.

The key to everything is balance. We can like something without lusting after something. We can dress nice without drawing attention to ourselves. We can have nice things without being swept into the mold or pattern of the world. We can function within the culture without conforming to the culture through lust and pride. Yes, even separated Christians can remain balanced as they live within the changing culture of their own generation.

So what seems to be the final answer to how the Christian must live in the midst of the changing culture? It is safe to assume that the

Christian can change with the culture so long as the culture does not change the Christian. This means that culture should never deter the believer from being obedient to the clear commands and principles of the Word of God in some particular area of his life. Nor should the Christian allow the culture to become worldly to his own personal life by seeking to conform to its changing patterns for fleshly and prideful reasons. Each believer must study, learn and accept the timeless principles of God's Word as outlined on pages 4-6. These unchanging principles of the Bible will help every believer to counteract everything in the culture that distorts truth.

Each individual must also learn to not conform to culture for the worldly reasons of lust and pride. We must also remember that changing with the culture is not necessarily the same as conforming to the culture. We might want to wear a new style of clothing that is modest and have no fleshly or prideful reasons for doing it. Our heart must be right when engaging in any action.

We might decide to purchase some new dress, car, appliance or particular device for our home without possessing any covetous or fleshly reasons for doing so. We might buy a new home to use for the Lord's glory without the slightest intent of drawing attention to ourselves. In these particular examples and many more, we can safely change with the culture without conforming to the culture.

In reality, every Christian changes with the culture to some degree. But great care must be taken that changing with the culture does not cross over the border of separation and lead to covetous or worldly conformity. There is a line of demarcation. And the teaching of God's eternal Word coupled with the Holy Spirit's conviction will tell us when we conform and when we have allowed the system to rule our lives.

The church in the midst of a changing culture must be constantly aware of cultural activities, practices and trends, which go against the principles of Bible separation. We must also be on guard against those cultural changes which are not sinful in and of themselves but which can also captivate our eyes, our flesh and the pride which comes from the old nature. That new style of clothing or new red car may bring us to the place where we actually begin to covet some of those "things" which are in the world (1 John 2:15) that we really do

not need or which God does not intend for us to have. Or we may experience the urge to stay trendy just to keep up with everyone else in order to feel accepted by the vast majority of people and promote ourselves. When we must conform to just conform and compete with the rest just to compete, then we will find our hearts and lives overtaken and captivated by the world system. We will become guilty of conforming to the world for fleshly and prideful reasons. These are the root causes for our conformity to the present culture, which revolves around covetousness, psychology, Rock Music, fads, styles, etc.

Every believer must seek to “keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). We can very easily become soiled by the system and play into the hands of the enemy. Satan wants to rule our lives through the world system. Therefore, he is constantly parading the system before our eyes and minds to create lust and pride in our hearts. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through the power of God (Eph. 6:10), the protective armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-17), and the pipeline of prayer (Eph. 6:18) which holds the armor together.

One concerned pastor said:

“The frenzy of American culture is so pervasive even Christians get caught in the futile madness. Pastors have difficulty finding volunteers to staff vital ministries. Christians say the church makes too many demands on their time. It's as if the world is sucking believers out of the pews and into the whirlpool of materialism.”

Examination

- What are some worldly things in your life today that you need to get rid of?
- Are there things that are ruling or controlling your life?
- Are you rebelling against some clearly ordained Biblical principles as outlined on pages 4-6?
- Are you conforming to the things in this world for fleshly and prideful reasons?

- Are you living to impress others and promote yourself?
- Are you trying to fit in with the crowd to hide your Christianity and conform to a group of people that have wrong value systems?
- Are you trying to conform to the standards of the world and others just to keep up with them and promote yourself among the system?
- Do you have a strong desire to have every new thing that someone else has in order to try and stay on top and remain like others?
- Do you want to impress others by the things that you purchase or the way that you look?
- How much of the culture is affecting your walk, service, stand and testimony for the Lord?
- Generally speaking, what do you think about during the course of the day?
- What do you tend to look at and concentrate on during the course of a day?
- Are you struggling with some specific lust or deep-seated pride?
- What sins of the flesh or the world system have been overtaking your life – bitterness, swearing, jealousy, thoughts of fornication or adultery (Gal. 5:19-21)?
- Is the world culture of sports and hobbies keeping you from church?
- What is your level of commitment to the cause of Christ?
- What areas of the culture must you learn to counteract?

2 Corinthians 7:1 says:

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

It has been said:

“The problem with Christians in America is not that Christians aren't where they should be; the problem is that they're not what they should be right where they are.”