

How To Respond To A Changing World?

Today's sermon is based on John 17:15-18 and uses (and changes and extends) commentary by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) in his book "Christ And Culture".

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Make them holy by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." - John 17:15-18.

Here Jesus is praying for his disciples of all time – that's us! He has opened up his heart so we might see his concerns, his dreams, his prayer for US! His prayer is that we will be like him: *"IN the world, but not OF the world."* But how does that work? Four ways that don't and the one that does...

1. IGNORANCE MODE. "Not IN the world."

Ignorance is bliss? This happens when we talk only to people who support our views - when we avoid differences and conflict - when we are so heavenly minded we are no earthly good. Reinhold Niebuhr doesn't really discuss this one. Martin Luther rejected a monastic life hidden from the world as a monk. Is your church ignorant of the community around it? Are you avoiding the neighbours on your street? Are you IN the world? Or are you avoiding it? Jesus calls us to be IN the world – it's not optional.

2. CONFORMING MODE. "IN the world and OF the world."

Some want to be relevant so much they lose their integrity. Niebuhr called this "Christ Of Culture". To relate to those around us we need to *adapt* to their culture and learn their language. But we don't need to *adopt* everything. People in conforming mode make Jesus 'whatever you want' and then they've got nothing new to bring. If there is no real difference between you and those around you without faith you're probably uncritically adopting much culture that is not Jesus and is the world!

3. PROTECTION MODE. "In the world and AGAINST the world."

This is when your goal is only to protect your own way of life. When all we can think of is protecting our way of life we forget how to love. When we commonly think in terms of "them" and "us" we may be headed this way. Niebuhr calls this "Christ Against Culture." In protection mode we are not open to change because we are protecting ourselves and our way. It's ultimately selfish.

4. DOMINANCE MODE. "IN the world and DOMINATING the world."

Dominance was favoured by the Roman Emperor Constantine who decreed that Christianity would be the official religion of empire - religion and government in bed together. Niebuhr calls this "Christ Over Culture". Those in dominance mode want everything done their way. But control is not Christ's way. Christ won by losing and serving and giving and dying for us!

5. GRACE MODE. "IN the world but NOT OF the world."

For Jesus Christ it's more than just respecting differences – it's about giving your life for them. Relationships come first! Grace mode is who Jesus Christ is. He is God come down to be just like us – one of us – in our skin. Listening, caring, being IN with world with us. Choosing to be IN the world, IN relationship with us. For me God makes no sense without Jesus. God can never be "of" the world and accept all the corrupt things we do. But in Jesus Christ God comes to be "in" the world. Turn to Jesus Christ, call on him, put your trust in him, ask him to be your strength!

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