

Christ and Culture: How should Christians interact with culture?

By Bryan Gilde

The influence of a fallen world cannot be underestimated. The more mature must model and mentor younger believers to see clearly that “bad company corrupts good morals” (I Cor. 15:33). This influencing “bad company” not only include unbelievers, but even fellow believers. Paul’s usage in I Corinthians 15 is speaking of those within the visible church who have a negative theological influence. Today, the influence of others happens just as much on a screen as it does in person. While Romans 12:2 warns of being conformed or guided by this world, Jerry Bridges cautions against “just going along with culture around us as long as [just because] that culture is not obviously sinful” (Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, 166). This statement by Bridges can be applied to the cultural influence of both the unsaved world *and the church*.

Thus far my description of the world’s culture has been one of caution and is the wise starting place. While culture was originally good in the Garden of Eden, it is now a fallen culture—both outside and within the *called out ones* (*ekklesia*, church). God created this world and the culture with it as good, but this goodness is now corrupt. While there remains much good in culture to celebrate, we must be wise in our interactions (Matthew 10:16: “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves”). In fact, Matthew 5:45 says God gives good things to both the good and evil in this world.

The tone of God in Scripture is to be *in* this fallen world, but not be a part of it (John 17:15-16). While we are in the world, we love all those around us, but we look forward to a *new world* (new heavens and earth) where there will be pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11, 63:3; Col. 3:1-3). I John 2:15 warns the reader against loving the world—for the love of the Father is a much greater prize. Yet, if we don’t love the things in this world, where do we find joy? Can’t a child of God *enjoy* the things in this world?

In thinking through these questions, we must remember, there are no easy answers to hard questions (Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 4). But, like a complicated car engine with many moving parts, we can arrive at a satisfactory answer after a long drive. Solomon gives his answer to “How we enjoy this fallen world?” in the short book of Ecclesiastes. The following diagram splits this enjoyment into four views of culture where we likely end up being a blend of all four.

The implications of understanding your own view are helpful in not tending towards one quadrant. We are by nature over-reactors who can realize we enjoy this world too much and start to take God much more seriously. In this scenario we become so “heavenly minded that we are no earthly good.” These are those who regularly neglect family time for church time and whose conversations are only about ministry. Finding the right balance between enjoying culture (God’s creation) and “Going Forth,” requires discernment.

The implication for church leadership is to be aware of the consensus view used to make decisions. Significantly different views will eventually cause frustration and disunity.

Two Kingdoms

Tension
Change happens when:
Lost → Saved
Limited hope of a changed culture
Stresses imp. of church life
Culture is bad

Relevant

Look for good, be okay with bad (evil)
Christ will forgive
Culture is good
Work with and accommodate

MORE COMMON GRACE

Be Holy Humble Excellence	Common Good
Church as Counter-Culture	Christian Worldview

PASSIVE ABOUT CULTURE

ACTIVE IN CULTURE

Withdraw/monastic
Culture is evil
Keep to self and just set example

Church is called to influence and change government, arts, science
Be very active in community
Christ can redeem culture

Counter-Culture

Transforming

LESS COMMON GRACE

(Adapted from Tim Keller's diagram as referenced by Charles Briggs