

"In, But Not of, The World"

Psalm 1; John 17:13-19

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+1)

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+17:13-19)

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Christ Following Mothers make a difference in our world!

I am glad that we can take time today to honor the mothers of our country. Mothers need to be honored and cherished more than one day, but at least on this day we can take the time to begin a practice that I hope will carry throughout the year. I have said for many years that one of the most difficult jobs in America is the "stay at home" mother of preschool children. The culture does not affirm them. Their children demand of them. And, for the most part their husbands misunderstand them. Yes, indeed, we do need to honor our mothers today and everyday. Moms have to deal with a lot. We need to honor them.

Moms have to deal with their guilt. Sally Forth says in a mother's day cartoon; "When I was 20 or so I made a list of all the things my mother did that bugged me while I was growing up, and I swore I'd never do any of them to My children. Now I'm a mother and find I've done every one of those things...Heck, I've done things like that that weren't even on the list. So I'm making a different list to give her today...It's a list of all the things that made her a great mom. Maybe one of the tricks to being a great mom is to live long enough for your kids to have kids and realize just how hard it is..."

Moms have to deal with constant frustration. A young child was afraid of storms. During a banging thunder storm his mother spent a great deal of time helping him settle down and go to bed upstairs. The young boy, still frightened, came downstairs to crawl in bed with his parents. They sent him back upstairs with more encouragement. Each time a loud bang of thunder split the sky, he would rocket back downstairs. After going up and down the stairs several times his mother said, "God is upstairs with you. God will protect you. Stay with God." A few minutes later there is a clap of thunder and a flash of lightening and the boy comes downstairs again and says, "You can go up and be with God, I'm staying here where it is safe."

Moms have to deal with shame heaped upon them by insensitive advocates of a success oriented, materialist world. Anthony Campolo, Professor of Sociology at Eastern Baptist College says: "Too many times women are made to feel that they should apologize for being mothers and housewives. In reality, such roles are noble callings. When I was on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, there were gatherings from time to time to which faculty members brought their spouses. Inevitably, some woman lawyer or sociologist would confront my wife with the question, "And what is it that you do, my dear?" My wife who is one of the most brilliantly articulate individuals I know, had a great response: "I am socializing two Homo Sapiens in the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order that they might be instruments for the transformation of the social order into the teleologically prescribed utopia inherent in the eschaton." When she followed that with, "And what is it that you do?" the other person's "A lawyer," just wasn't that overpowering.

The translation of Mrs, Campolo's phrase is quite simply, Christian mothers make a difference when they raise children according to the directions of Jesus' final prayer.

- Jesus' mother made a difference for the world by raising Jesus to follow the guidance of God.
- St. Augustine's mother made a difference through her continual prayers for her son to make a difference in the world by following Jesus Christ.
- Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles Wesley, made a difference by raising up sons who so engaged the culture of Great Britain for Christ that thousands of people came to know Jesus Christ through their preaching and music.
- Christian mothers you too make a difference when you raise children according to the directions of Jesus' prayer.

Let me invite you to listen to a small portion of Christ's final prayer. Jesus prays,

"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. Sanctify them 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)
(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+17:15-18)

Mothers and Fathers it is important for our families, for our church, for our community, and for our world that we follow the directive of Jesus' prayer. We are called to raise up children who will so love and honor Jesus Christ that they will be participants in the continuing transformation of our world.

In 1953 theologian H. Richard Niebuhr wrote his classic book, Christ and Culture. In spite of the tremendous contribution Niebuhr made in that volume, the church still needs a theology of culture today as desperately as it did when Niebuhr's book was written. His book suggests that the church has used different ways to respond to the culture in the last two millennium. Some of the choices have been disastrous. Choosing wrongly will decidedly cripple our attempts to participate fully in the unity of spirit and purpose Jesus lived and died and rose again to create. Let us look at three choices of relating to our culture.

1. Christ against Culture:

This attitude takes the mandate that we are not of this world to extremes. The anti-cultural bias has been present in the church since the first solitaries sought God among the caves and sands of the desert. Communal attempts at anti-culturalism are still quite visible today. The Amish reject "modern" clothing and conveniences (i.e., plumbing, electricity, automobiles). In Judaism the Hasids and Lubavitchers offer a similar visual reminder that the late twentieth century isn't for everybody.

But unless one lives completely cut off from all other human contact, it is virtually impossible to be a successful anti-culturalist. You have to live in the world somewhere. The gospel must be "enfleshed" in some culture. Even the Amish have embraced some culture: the early nineteenth century Pennsylvania Dutch. The Hasids live in 1870s Poland. Everyone must live somewhere in history, in some culture, whether past or present.

The trouble with much of the Christian literature and broadcasting today; however, is this very 'the world against us' attitude. The push to home schooling, to so called Christian schools, and to single color, uniform, identical, homogenous churches is a manifestation of this fear based attitude. When fear overcomes Christ's presence, then we begin to trust in our own methods and seek to withdraw from the culture. The problem with this fear based attitude is that we are not following Jesus. When fear increases, faith in the Risen Christ decreases.

This fearful urge to remove ourselves from the world sets up a negative, "us against the world" mentality that comes across as judgmental arrogance. People want to be in the right crowd, so the leaders of fear based churches teach us the technique of pointing out the wrong people so that the right people feel justified in being just the way they are. This withdrawal from engagement with those who are different, leaves the Christian church that follow this path as an inward looking, dying group of people.

Jesus' prayer is not that we will leave the world. Jesus' prayer is that we will, through the Spirit of God, become persons who will transform this present world. Rather than teach our children to withdraw and live in fear, we need to teach them to follow Jesus into God's business of creating a new world.

2. Christ And Culture:

The other end of the spectrum is the Christian family or church that anxiously wants to fit into the world so much that it loses any distinguishing particularity and becomes just another part of the world. These are the "golden retriever" churches and Christians -- the culture throws a stick and they go bounding after it, slobbering and eager to please. Even those who happily own these indiscriminate, accepting dogs bemoan the fact that "if a burglar broke in, they'd just hold the flashlight for him."

En-culturated churches are so painfully "politically correct" that any attempt to articulate a strong moral value, a dynamic moral absolute, or a statement genuine truth is quickly shuttled away to committee instead of standing up and witnessing to the world.

En-cultured Christian families see nothing wrong with letting the television, the news media, the schools, and their children's peer group teach their value lessons for them. After all their children must be in the right crowd at school. Regular church attendance is not important. Being responsible is not important. Making excuses for misguided behavior is the rule. Soccer, cheer leading, football, baseball, track, family exhaustion times, et.al. are much more important than regular church attendance, regular family prayer and Bible study, regular home values teaching sessions.

En-cultured Christian families are more afraid of their young children being upset with coming to church than they are with consequences of their children adopting the values of the prevailing culture. In short, encultured Christians play at looking like they are Christians. They wear the label without being concerned for the depth and commitment and the quality of their lives or their children's lives. The natural consequence of this encultured position is children with only a nominal relationship with Jesus Christ and a set of values that more reflects Bevis and Butthead than Holy Scripture.

3. Christ-In-Culture:

The aim of the Christ-in-culture church is incarnation, not enculturation or acculturation. The incarnational Christian uses the knowledge, the ignorance, the strength and weaknesses of current culture to embody Christ for this time and place. In order to avoid becoming an obedient lap dog or a rebellious fanatic, the incarnational Christian must learn to live their faith in Christ while working to transform their little corner of the world.

Mothers and Fathers, in **Ephesians 6:14-18**, (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+6:14-18) the Apostle Paul writes the marching orders for us and for our children to become transformative, incarnational living followers of Jesus Christ.

"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers..."

The key words for incarnational Christian Moms, Dads, and children are:

- **Truth-Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life! (John 14:6)**
(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+14:6)
- **Righteousness-Jesus teaches the right and responsible way of living and those who hunger for Jesus' way of living will be filled up! (Matthew 5:6)**
(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+5:6)
- **Peace-Following Jesus we are God's children who share God's peace in this tumultuous, fear filled world! (Matthew 5:9)** (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+15)
- **Faith-in Jesus drives out all fear and fills us up with God's amazing love. (I John 4:18)**
(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+john+4:18)
- **Salvation-Jesus came to save the world, not to destroy it! As followers of Jesus we work with Him to transform the world into a grace filled place. (John 3:16-18)**
(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+3:16-18)
- **The word of God- is inspired by God for teaching us for challenging us, for correcting us, and for training us in living God's right way! (II Timothy 3:16)**
(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+timothy+3:16)
- **Prayer- Following Jesus we regularly withdraw to a private place to enter into conversation with our friend, leader, guide, and Lord Jesus Christ. (Matthew 6:1-6)**
(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+6:1-6)

These are the eternally important living principles and values that we must teach our children. The way we teach is through example as well as our words. Such life changing, life transforming living is caught as well as taught. Instead of abandoning these key words as the acculturated Christians do, we must live them out in our homes and in our church. Instead of obsessing on them as the anticultural fanatics do, we are called to live in relationship with Jesus Christ so that His creative strength flows through us and we joyfully transform our world.

A summary of God's transformative challenge is found in **Romans 12: 2-21**. (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+12:2-21)

Pastor: Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-- what is good and acceptable and perfect.

People: For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Pastor: For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

People: We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Pastor: Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

People: Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

Pastor: Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

People: Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Pastor: Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

People: Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Pastor: Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

People: Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

Pastor: Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

People: If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Pastor: Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."

People: Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

In **John 17** (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+17), Jesus prayed for us that we would live as He lived in but not of the world. Jesus prayed that His mission will be our mission. His ministry will be our ministry. Jesus prayed that we will overcome our fears of this world so that we can transform it. Jesus prayed so that we could live in the world, but not be a slave to the world's values and beliefs.

Mothers and Fathers, Grandmothers and Grandfathers, let us commit ourselves to so living our lives that our children will see the joy and creativity of Jesus Christ within us. Brothers and Sisters, let us raise our children so that we can say together that the world is closer to becoming the Kingdom of our God because of our living.