

The World and the Christian Faith

B. Living in an Unbelieving World

Introduction

One of the features of world politics is the issue of lack of trust. And that is certainly true when it comes to international relationships with Russia and China.

Furthermore, the Americans don't trust the North Koreans, and the North Koreans don't trust the Americans. But then, why should they? After all, the Americans are very vocal in their concerns about the nuclear ambitions of North Korea, particularly in regard to them acquiring nuclear weapons. However, the Americans have shown no indication of any preparedness to dispose of their own.

Now does that sound fair, or even a reasonable basis to start talks? Or does that sound like the Americans wanting to maintain an advantage over the North Koreans?

Now, of course, it's not just the Americans who don't trust the North Koreans—there are many other countries who have expressed similar concerns. But then it's not just the North Koreans who don't trust the Americans, because many countries have a deep lack of trust in the Americans too.

A Divided World

But with attitudes like that, we shouldn't be surprised that this world is littered with a history of tensions, wars, and conflicts—many of which began from a lack of trust. It's what humans are good at. And that same lack of trust is just as evident within nations, and even within the family unit.

People don't always do the right thing. People don't always care for one another. And our modern preference for putting ourselves first—'my needs', 'my wants'—before the needs of others, certainly doesn't help matters. But then even if we were able to find someone in whom we could trust, at some stage we would invariably become disappointed.

To have peace in the world there needs to be trust. But how can that ever be when the emphasis is on putting ourselves before others? Trust is something that we should all try to exude. But it is also something that none of us can achieve. We all make mistakes. We all let people down. So, if we can't do it, who can?

Well, Christians believe that there is a solution—one man in whom we can trust, who will be faithful to us, and will never let us down. And that is Jesus. The problem is, however, the world in general does not agree. And as a consequence, Christians cannot help but live in a world of conflict.

So the world is divided against itself. And if the majority have rejected God—or at least the God as he has revealed himself—and if the majority have rejected Jesus, they have rejected the only possible solution to lack of trust. For there can be no other solution to conflict in our families, in our communities, within our countries, and outside our borders.

As a consequence, the world will just keep on not trusting, being divided, and being involved in conflicts. Yes, it may be Russia or China, or even North Korea this time, but inevitably it will be some other country in a few years' time.

A Different Sense of Morality

So if the world does not know how to resolve lack of trust, it cannot know the Christian concept of love either. Because as Christians, we are supposed to love our fellow believers and love our enemies too. (And the Bible has many references to the concept of love and to the concept of hatred.)

So for example, the Bible implicitly describes things that God hates in the various laws he has provided—in the things he has told his followers not to do. And it is particularly explicit in his attitude to robbery (*Isaiah 61:8*) and divorce (*Malachi 2:16*). However, the Bible also states that believers are to hate wickedness (*Psalms 45:7*), evil (*Psalms 97:10; Proverbs 8:13; Amos 5:15; Romans 12:9*), and what is false (*Proverbs 13:5*).

Having said that, we need to remember that what the world calls 'love' is not necessarily what God calls 'love'. And what the world calls 'evil' is not necessarily what God calls 'evil' either.

Indeed, in the Bible we are reminded, time after time, that the term 'evil' describes what people do in putting put a wedge between themselves and God. Hence the Book of Kings is very good at describing the kings of Israel and Judah in terms of whether they were good at restoring faith in God, or whether they allowed or encouraged people to worship other gods. They either did 'good' in the eyes of God, or they did 'evil'.

And that is particularly relevant when it comes to viewing the world from a Christian perspective. Because what we should 'hate'—or not be part of—are the things that create a wedge or a barrier between us and God, and between us and the world as God created it to be.

Christian Priorities

So, if the world is divided, and if the world does not know, understand, or even care about the biblical standards of 'love', how is it that a Christian can live in this world?

a). Giving God His Due

Well, the first thing is . . . that God's people need to always give God his due.

Because whatever people's attitudes to God—and many people say they believe—we cannot go along with redefining God into something that people are comfortable with. We cannot water him down to the mediocre and agree that sin is not to be taken seriously.

And examples of that can be seen in society. Because the well-worn phrase 'The true meaning of Christmas' (or Easter), is often used to describe happy, family times, rather than the birth (or death) of the Messiah. Furthermore, the term 'The ultimate sacrifice' is often used in terms of soldiers who have died in war, and allows little room for comparison with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ—which was something he did voluntarily, as an act of obedience to the Father.

Now it is very easy to remake God in one's own image, and our society today seems to be a master at it. And yet, that is not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible takes seriously the concepts of who he is and who we are. It also takes seriously the concept of sin—the things that separates the people from himself. Furthermore, it takes seriously the pains that God has gone to, to bridge the gap, to allow his creation to be considered worthy to live with him in eternity. As a consequence, any denigration of who he is, denies the reality of God, and denies the reality of sin.

b). Promoting Healthy Communities

The second thing is . . . that God's people need to be concerned about the health of the community. Now it might seem a rough thing to say, but people are generally more concerned about themselves—and we live in a society which is very 'me' orientated. And as an example of that, we hear expressions like, 'I want ...', 'I deserve ...', and 'What's in it for me?'

The 'me' society is also very evident in the way advertising is targeted, and how election campaigns are run. Indeed, follow everything that is thrown at you from the television (which is simply a reflection of our society), and you have our selfish, self-centred community in a nutshell. Yes, of course, there are some bright lights in the community, but generally people are more concerned about their own welfare than on the well-being of others.

And yet, the idea of the individual being more important than the community is not a model that God has given us. Indeed, in the Ten Commandments and in the numerous laws in the Old Testament, God's focus is on what is needed for a healthy, faithful community. As a consequence, juggling his rule, and tossing out the bits we don't like, means we are effectively reinventing God's idea of community.

There are reasons why God provided certain rules for a healthy community. And even though many may think they know better, or some may think 'What's the harm, I'm not hurting anyone', we corrupt God's plan when we come up with our own alternative. Messing with God's laws only ends in the destruction of the community. And we shouldn't be a part of that at all.

c). Suffering for the Faith

And the third thing is . . . that God's people are required to suffer for their faith.

Now one of the more common problems, today, is that if you disagree with someone, you are at risk of being labelled a 'hater'. Indeed the idea of 'hate speech' has become a rather common and unfortunate term given to people who simply disagree with the way another person thinks. As a consequence, some people are inflicted with the epithet, simply because they have an opposing view.

And that's sad, particularly when the person being labelled is simply expressing his or her own godly beliefs. Because not everyone who disagrees with modern trends has a phobia or hates certain people. And it should not necessarily be seen as a hateful attack on a particular individual or a group. But unfortunately, that is the way that contrary beliefs are often seen.

In a kind of irony, the attack on Christian beliefs, regarding the structures of the family and the community, often border on bullying—the very thing our society say needs to be removed from our society. And yet, the way our politicians behave to one another, and the way our sportsmen

play, suggests that bullying is well-entrenched at all levels of our society, and there is no intention of resolving that any time soon.

People have learnt that you if you shout and scream you have a greater chance of being heard. Therefore, the term ‘hate speech’ is often used against those with a contrary view, in order for people to get their own way.

Summary

Now all of the three things I’ve mentioned fit into the category of putting a wedge between people and God. Reinventing God effectively denies who is and denies the reality of sin. Reinventing the family and community structures, denies the structures that God set up for a healthy community. And bullying people who are trying to uphold godly principles, is an attack against God and his sense of community. And all three things meet the criteria of things that Christians should not adopt, but oppose.

But should Christian’s ‘hate’? Yes, they should. But they should only hate those things that attack who God is, the reality of sin, and obstacles to building a healthy community. There needs to be a balance between ‘love’ and ‘hate.’ And getting that balance right is something that we need God’s help with, in order to get it right.

Conclusion

In the past, the Christian church may have enjoyed a privileged position in many parts of the world, but that is no longer the case. And the situation is not likely to improve. But then that’s not really surprising. After all, both Jesus and Paul talked about Christians having to live in two worlds at the same time—this hostile world and the next.

We shouldn’t be surprised, then, to find there are no safe havens for anyone with Christian beliefs, anywhere in the world. And the only safe haven for Christians, today, remains in the context of a faith—and pursuit of that faith—in Jesus Christ.

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