



THE PASTOR'S PEN

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How Does the World See You?

Are you “in the world” or are you “of the world?” At first this may seem like a very strange question to ask. There is no doubt that if asked, we would all answer that, “sure we are living in the world” and indeed we are. Then we would most likely ask, “What does ‘of the world’ mean?” In scripture both the Apostle John and the Apostle Paul deal with this everyday topic. It refers to how we live and how we act in our everyday life. In other words, does the way we live everyday follow the example of Jesus or does it follow the example of world that does not know Him?

Now before you answer such a question, take a look at what Paul writes in Romans: 12 ¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

In John 17 Jesus, praying for all of His disciples, said:

¹⁷¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

So with these scriptures in mind, along with similar passages in Corinthians, Ephesians, and a few other references, how should we live? Should we strive to act according to what the world says is acceptable behaviour for society or should we strive to act the way Jesus did? As you consider that, take a look at what happened in a church in Salt Lake City.

A 52-year-old man accused of punching another man and hitting him with his car in a dispute over pew space in Utah has been ordered to spend 30 days in jail. The Salt Lake Tribune reports (<http://bit.ly/1rDIOLL>) Wayne Dodge was sentenced Wednesday after pleading guilty to a misdemeanor assault charge. He was also ordered to complete an anger management class and pay a fine.

Weber County deputies say the fight happened last June at a Mormon meetinghouse during a crowded service that included a baby blessing and a missionary farewell. Authorities say Dodge sat in a section that another family had saved in hopes of getting a good view of the baby blessing. Dodge is accused of punching the man after the service, and striking him with his vehicle in the parking lot.

With events like this taking place how can anyone see a difference between the Church and the World? I wish I could say that this was an isolated incident, but it is not. Congregation oftentimes end up in the news and in the courts for tax evasion, board disputes that turn violent, slander and libel charges, police

raids of youth groups gatherings where alcohol is present and the list goes on. At times it seems as if the world is changing the Church rather than the Church changing the world, but notice I said “it seems.”

Before we hide our heads in embarrassment and turn to doom and gloom, we have to realize that for each article that we see in the paper, for each single story we see on FOX or CNN, there are tens-of-thousands of congregations that day that didn't make the news because they were following Christ and not involved in such activities. They were acting and living the way the Church is supposed to act and live, so no one took notice of them. Then there are the congregations that make the news because of their outreach to the poor and homeless, their commitment to food pantries, women's shelters and community involvement based upon Jesus' words from Matthew:

25⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

The truth is that there are tens-of-thousands, hundreds-of-thousands, millions, tens-of-millions, hundreds-of-millions of Christians living in the world today that are not of this world. They are following those same teachings of Jesus and are not “of this world.” yet we hear little of them, because the world does not want to be reminded of the higher calling and higher standards that Christ taught to His disciples. Often times the world looks for the exceptions to the Church rather than what the real Church is like when they tell their stories. Jesus warned about this kind of a future with these words recorded by John:

15¹⁸ “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’”

So where are you at today? Are you in the world or are you of the world? Only you can make that choice and then live it each and every day. If you choose to be in the world but not of the world, then I'll look forward to seeing you at worship this week.

In, but not of the world,

James