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Closet Convictions

Dan S. Shipley

"Nevertheless even of the rulers many believed on him: but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that is of men more than the glory that is of God." (Jn. 12:42, 43).

From its beginning, the cause of Christ has suffered because of disciples with closet convictions; the kind of men who know and believe the truth but will not stand up for it. Consider, for example, these influential rulers of our text. Potentially, their worth to the cause of their unconfessed Christ was immeasurable; effectively, however, they contributed absolutely nothing. Worse, their influence remained where they did, as must always be the case. What a testimonial to the tremendous swaying power of cowardice and pride! — It keeps them among those whom they oppose and puts them in opposition to their own faith and convictions. "But, after all", they may have reasoned, "we do have our standing in the community to think about". "And, besides, how could we ever explain to our friends of the synagogue circle about what we really believe? Why, what would they think?" — and so goes people-pleasing religion.

And so **stay** the people-pleasers in religion — in their "synagogues" of compromise and out of God's kingdom. But most of them do not see their "going along" as being all that serious, let alone as jeopardizing salvation. For example, it is not unusual to meet denominationalists who freely admit certain unscriptural practices espoused by their church, but will not speak out against them. They know and believe certain Bible truths, but will not practice them, for fear...? Now, what is the essential difference between these and the elders of our text? Is it less honorable to deny His doctrine is of the devil! "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day." (Jn. 12:48) Man's part in gaining a right standing with God lies in his knowing, believing, and obeying of gospel truth (Jn. 6:45, 8:32; Mk. 16:16; Rom. 6:17; Jas. 1:21,22). **Every right relationship with God is a truth-determined relationship!** All that God requires of man and all that man can ever do to please and glorify God is made known in His word (2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Jn. 9). He who shuns it, compromises it, or adds to it reflects on the God who gave it (1 Thss. 4:13), whether Jew, denominationalist or Christian.

In recent years, many members of the church of Christ have "awakened" to find themselves in "synagogues" of liberalism. They share the dilemma of the rulers to some extent. "Shall we speak out and risk being put out — or shall we go along to get along?" May God help them to see the seriousness and importance of standing up for the Lord by standing for His truth. To continue "going along" is to continue violating conscience and fellowshiping error. Friend, your influence is where you are. Demonstrate your allegiance to Christ and His truth while you can! Stand!

Plain Talk April 1968

Culture Wars

Everitt Heaton

Cultural differences are found on many different levels. There is the culture that each of us grow up in our own homes. Simple things like the kinds of things you enjoy, what time is bed time, do you call it lunch or dinner, is it vacuuming or sweeping? There are cultural differences in where we grow up. Those who live in the city have a different perspective than those who live out in the country. There are cultural differences in where one lives nationwide

depending on which state you live in. There are all kinds of things like race, religion, background, upbringing, (and the list goes on and on) that affect each of our lives.

Among all the things in our everyday lives that are heavily influenced by our culture, on whatever level, our understanding of right and wrong lie at its core. I'm sure we can all think of some things that what people find acceptable to do in other countries, in this country we view it differently and vice versa. History is full of conflicts and wars because one nation sought to correct what they perceived to be wrong in another country. The question then is how do these same things affect God's people?

The reason we have the book of Judges in large part today is because of culture affecting God's people. The mission and instruction from the Lord was simple and clear. Drive out all the inhabitants and utterly destroy them all. The conquest began well with exception to a few hurdles but overall went well. In Judges 1:27-36 we're told that Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan did not drive out the inhabitants but instead either forced them into labor as slaves or allowed them to remain. For a time they were faithful to the Lord (Judges 2:7) but it didn't take long for them to forget. "And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel." (Judges 2:10)

In Matthew 5 we have the first recorded sermon from Jesus as He begins his ministry. Not only does He immediately set the tone for what kingdom citizenship must look like He in essence seeks to correct their culture. Starting in Matthew 5:21 Jesus deals with the religious culture that they had established and were being led in by the Pharisees and Scribes. Five times Jesus says "You have heard that it was said" in that chapter. He dealt with anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and loving your enemies. They had created a culture that was based upon God's law but that had enabled them to sin.

In 1 Corinthians 6 and 10 Paul realizes that the surrounding culture was affecting God's people. Paul sought to correct some of that even quoting a phrase that was common to them. 1 Corinthians 6:12 – "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything." 1 Corinthians 10:23 – "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up." It seems the culture they were living in had adopted that anything that they seemed to be good for them was in fact lawful. Paul in essence says that way of thinking is flawed and even if some things were technically lawful that doesn't mean they are beneficial.

The present danger that I believe that God's people are still in today is that our culture greatly affects us today and at times we don't even realize how much. One of the positive things about the internet and social media is that everyone can read and hear what Christians are saying about all kinds of topics. One of the negative things about the internet and social media is that everyone can read and hear what Christians are saying about all kinds of topics. With the recent events in our nation such as Charlottesville people are taking a hard stand on racism. That is good because I think scripture is clear that racism and such acts of hatred are wrong.

What should concern us is that while taking a stand against racism is definitely what Christians should always do it seems that many Christians are taking a stand against it because our current culture says its wrong. Bring up the topic of homosexuality and surprisingly you'll see a different response. Many Christians still take a strong stand with scripture condemning it but others refuse to get involved just settling to be indifferent and others actually come out and criticize other Christians for taking such a hard stance. Why? Because our culture has been and has now fully accepted it as "right" instead of "wrong."

We could talk about divorce & remarriage, sexual relations outside of marriage, drug/alcohol use, modesty, respect for authority, even time management. All these things that scripture is very clear on and yet because of the culture we live in our discernment of right and wrong is greatly affected.

As we live our lives and interact in our homes, workplaces, schools and communities I think we'd do well to remember that #1 – **Truth is not in the eye of the beholder but in the will of the Creator:** Psalm 119: 153-160, Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 5:10, 17, & 1 Thessalonians 5:21. #2 – **Our sanctification only comes through His truth:** John 17:17-19. #3 – **We are to speak the truth in love:** Ephesians 4:11-16

“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.” (Psalm 119:160)

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