

SPIRIT OF THE AGE

“Find out which direction the world is going.
And turn around and do the opposite.”

By Harold Vaughn

Some of us came up during the fifties and sixties when fundamental preachers railed against the sin of "worldliness." The concept of "worldliness" was reduced to the externals of dress, associations, habits, and other tangible, visible manifestations of conformity to the world. In many cases the issues of the heart were seldom addressed. Every era has unique characteristics which help define it. These attributes have been referred to as "the spirit of the age." Throughout history there has always been a "worldly spirit or spirit of the age" that has dominated the thinking of the masses.

Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, plainly said; "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God" 1 Cor. 2:12 this thought is echoed in Ephesians 2:2 where reference is made to "walking according to the course of this world." Throughout Scripture the "world" is presented as the enemy of God and His people. "Know ye not the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" James 4:4. Repeatedly, we are warned about the "spirit of the world," the "course of this world," and the dangers of friendship with the world system.

Now we have come to the place where I fear we have drunk so deeply into the 'spirit of the age' or "worldly spirit" that everything is seen as compatible with Christianity. What are the dominant thought patterns and ideas of our generation? What is the spirit of our age that must be defined and rejected if we are serious about revival?

Tolerance

The only sin left in America is the sin of intolerance. "Diversity," we are told, is the source of our strength. In a pluralistic society we have to respect the "cultural diversity" of all peoples except those who founded the country and held to Judeo-Christian values! It has been said, "**Tolerance is the last virtue of a totally corrupt society.**" Our culture is marked by pluralism in creed and permissiveness in practice. Inclusivism demands that differences be denied and it's okay to think anything you choose, but don't be judgmental! A.W. Tozer wrote, "A new Decalogue has been adopted by the neo Christians of our day, "Thou shalt not disagree" and a new set of Beatitudes too,

Blessed are they that tolerate everything, for they shall not be made accountable for anything."

After decades of "doctrinal downsizing" it seems that the construction of Tower of Babel II is nearing completion. I heard some religious leaders speak of the need for the "United Nations of Religion." Ecumania is definitely the rage. The "feel-good, Mother Theresa evangelicals" are main stream. It has now gotten to the point where few dare say a word against the current move to amalgamate all who name themselves as Christians. In some quarters, Catholics and even the Mormons are accepted on the basis of a common moral outlook.

Religion has been defined as "morality tinged with emotion." Ecumania qualifies as religion, but it is definitely not Christian! Good intentions and infiltration have never been the means to revival and reformation.

How can anyone who is serious about revival overlook, ignore, and disobey the clear-cut Biblical commands to avoid fellowship with sin and error? Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then ye are my disciples indeed." John 8:31

It's time to bring back the Puritans. These serious saints had strong doctrinal beliefs and actually practiced what they believed! Today doctrine is seen as a stumbling block to unity rather than the Biblical basis for it. Treason is not too strong a word for those who make common cause with the opponents of TRUTH. Dr. Gresham Machen felt constrained to leave his denomination because of liberalism. In his farewell address at Princeton he said, "A man may believe what he pleases, provided he does not believe anything strongly enough to risk his life on it and fight for it. Tolerance is the great word."

Pragmatism

"If it works it must be right." "If it is successful it must be right." When churches and movements are judged solely on the criteria of their ability to draw large crowds and produce pleasant emotions, the spirit of pragmatism obviously holds full sway.

Right and wrong, good and evil, light and darkness no longer exist in a climate of pragmatism. Those who hold principles firmly grounded in truth are considered legalistic people with non-negotiable doctrinal convictions are viewed as unloving, intolerant, archaic, and unenlightened. Good intentions, more importantly, "results," are the measuring stick by which truth is determined.

The church growth experts tell us we have to target a specific group and give them what they want. The basic premise is to find out how people are thinking and appeal to the prevailing "felt-needs." In order to appear relevant, don't say anything to modern man that he is not already saying to himself. Use appropriate means and words to make everyone "feel" comfortable. Under this approach preachers are reduced to public-relations agents and the prophetic voice is silenced. John the Baptist, untrained in these techniques, told Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." This bold declaration of truth aroused such animosity that it cost him his life. But Jesus said there has never been a greater man born of woman than John the Baptist. Though an apparent failure by today's standards, he is a giant in heaven!

C. S. Lewis said, "I believe that there are too many accommodating preachers, and too many practitioners in the church who are not believers. Jesus Christ did not say, "Go into all the world and tell the world that it is quite right." The gospel is something completely different. In fact, it is directly opposed to the world." Amen!

Of course, we have to meet people where they are, but we cannot leave them there! Surely, there is a vast array of approaches God can use to reach people. However, our methods as well as our message must coincide with the character of God. De-emphasizing doctrine, denying the need of the Holy Spirit, and abandoning Truth have historically been the gateway to apostasy and that hasn't changed!

Lawlessness

Lawlessness came of age in the sixties when college campuses became riot zones. Rock music was the immoral medium that led the charge to defy all standards of decency and morality. Police were "pigs" and

fathers were referred to as "my old man." For decades now, structures of God-ordained authority have been under assault.

Examples of rebellion abound. Who has not heard co-workers talking disrespectfully of the boss or corporation? Because civil government has become oppressive, some justify revolt and advocate the use of force to overthrow it. Corrupt political leaders provide the rationale to join the "RUSH" in lampooning and satirizing the office of the President. I find no reference of Jesus or the apostles criticizing the absolutely corrupt Roman government or its wicked leaders. Romans 13:1 states that all power comes from God.

Rebellion is the genesis of every manifestation of the worldly spirit. From the Fall to the 21st century, the world system has been rebelling against God's authority. "We will not have this man rule over us" is the continuous cry of a defiant humanity. Have you seen the T-shirt that reads, "Question Authority"? Since all power and authority comes from God, this statement amounts to a recipe for anarchy.

The true nature of rebellion is seen in I Sam.15:23, where the prophet Samuel said to Saul, "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft." Saul was only partially obedient, which amounted to total disobedience in God's sight! The spirit of rebellion is the spirit of witchcraft, and witchcraft is the spirit of Satan.

As we see the present world continues to slide farther and farther from God in a climate of rebellion, the vast majority of churches fall in right behind the world. Scores of churches no longer want a pastor, servant-leader, to shepherd them. All they want is a chaplain-someone to marry and bury them! In countless congregations there is an appalling lack of respect for the office of pastor and the man occupying it. Pastors are viewed as plantation slaves who can be replaced if they fail to perform satisfactorily.

But membership in a local church means accountability. "Obey them that have the rule over you." Jesus marveled at the centurion who understood the principle of authority because his outlook was so rare. Rebellion is serious. Miriam was struck with leprosy when she murmured against God's prophet, Moses. When Korah instigated an uprising, the earth opened its mouth and swallowed him and his cohorts. Deep repentance and submission is the only cure for widespread and deeply ingrained disdain for spiritual authority

The subject of rebellion really hits HOME! Families are failing Counseling is a billion-dollar industry. Satan is cited as the culprit in assaulting the institution called the family.

The permanence of marriage, principles of child-rearing, the chain of command, the husband's role, the wife's responsibility, and children honoring Mom and Dad are black and white issues in the Word of God. While there is little doubt an external assault is underway, the main problem may lie within. Rejecting God's design for the home can't be blamed on outside pressures and temptations. The real problem here is rebellion and that clearly reflects the spirit of the age.

Self Centeredness

Christianity has been corrupted by the passion for pleasure. Listen to this excerpt from the book, Hot Tub Religion: Freudianism has captured Christian no less than post-Christian imaginations with its picture of the human individual driven by desperate desires for pleasure's especially sexual pleasure's and likely to come apart at the seams if these desires are not indulged. Humanism has touted individual self-expression, self-discovery, self-realization, and self-fulfillment as life's supreme goal.

Hot tub religion has been described as sensuous, relaxing, floppy, laid back, not in any way demanding, very, very nice even to the point of being great fun. "Making pleasure, comfort, and happiness one's goal guarantees you will miss them all. As has been said, the seeds of happiness grow most strongly in the soil of service. Jesus said the way to find your life is by losing it, in Him. Radical statements such as this cut right across the grain of modern thinking.

Selfism doesn't even pretend to mold the life pattern to the Gospel. Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a man He bids him come and die." The man who defined Puritanism as "the haunting fear that somewhere, somehow, somebody might be happy' totally missed the heart of the Gospel. True and everlasting happiness comes through self-denial, not self-indulgence!

Worldliness is embracing the world's values. D.L. Moody said, "The place for the ship is in the sea but God help the ship if the sea gets into it." No, Christians are not professional kill-joys. Theo centric simply means we exist for God rather than He for us. Egocentric praying is our attempt at managing and directing God to accomplish our will instead of His. If "covetousness is idolatry" then attempting to harness the power of God to the priorities of self-centeredness is SIN!

Christians today no longer live for heaven. Therefore, the concept of detachment from this world is seldom considered, let alone practiced. The world is after pleasure, profit, power, and privilege, and so are we! Nowadays nonconformity to the world, if mentioned at all, relates to the means to attain these goals and not the goals themselves. It is possible to avoid the recognized taboos and yet still thoroughly identify with the sins of society.

Christianity affirms the physical world as God's creation and renounces the "world spirit" as corrupted by sin. Contrary to popular thinking, the spirit of the age is NOT the Spirit of God. The spirit of the age embodies and embraces the world's way of looking at life and must be rejected. "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind's." Rom 12:2

I've heard of some who were so heavenly-minded they were no earthly good. But this is not our problem. The great need today is found in Colossians 3:2 "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." C.S. Lewis said "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next."

Do we reflect the image of God, or do we merely mirror the culture? Are we more like the unchanging Christ or the world which is passing away? Is our outlook humanistic or Christian? Is our world view Biblical or pagan? Are we ambassadors for God's kingdom or merely salesmen in the kingdom of this world? Brethren, are we guilty of the subtle sin of worldliness?

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world: the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17). Author Harold Vaughn

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