

What on Earth Are We Doing? Finding Our Place as Christians in the World by John Fischer (Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, MI: 1996) (60 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Being Salt and Light in Today's World

I believe that Christ established the church (his body of believers on earth) not to develop its own separate customs, civilization, and achievements, but to infuse the customs, civilization, and achievements of every age and society with people who love and fear God. [Page 9]

2. A Christian Vocabulary Needed

As Harry Blamires has stated: We twentieth-century Christians have chosen the way of compromise. We withdraw our Christian consciousness from the fields of public, commercial, and social life. When we enter these fields we are compelled to accept for purposes of discussion the secular frame of reference established there. We have no alliterative except that of silence... We have no Christian vocabulary to match the complexities of contemporary political, social, and industrial life. How should we have? A language is nurtured on usage, not on silence, however high-principled. And we have long since ceased to bring Christian judgment to bear upon the secular public world. Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, (Ann Arbor, MI.: Servant, 1963) p. 27. [Page 18]

3. Christian Business Incorporated into Secular Companies

Some of the larger Christian publishing houses and record companies are now owned by secular corporations. Christian executives have to answer regularly to the bottom line. Many of the biggest investors in the Christian subculture do not have a sensitivity to ministry or to the things of God. Rather they see the Christian subculture as an opportunity to seize upon a profitable new market. [Page 23]

4. We Are Becoming Useless as Salt That Has Lost Its Savor

The greatest danger of a Christian subculture, however, is that it subverts the reason God has placed us in the world. The more ingrown we become, the less we have to contribute to the world around us. We are already dangerously close to being irrelevant. Studs Terkel foreshadowed the growing social, ethnic, and religious divisions in our society in his book *The Great Divide*, and the Christian subculture is making that divide come true. [Page 24]

5. Not a Separate Culture

Nowhere in the New Testament is there any call to believers to form a separate culture from the world. We were called to be separate from the world, but never to leave. Some

Christians confuse 2 Corinthians 6:17 as a call to leave the world. "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing." This section, however, concludes, "Since we have these promises, dear friends. Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit" perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (7:1). Paul is talking about an internal, personal holiness, not a separate culture he wants us to create, as if living in it will make us holy by osmosis. [Page 26]

6. Failure to Exercise the Mind of Christ

In *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Mark Noll laments the way Christians have failed to pursue what it means to think like a Christian about the nature and workings of the physical world, the character of human social structures like government and the economy, the meaning of the past, the nature of artistic creation" and the circumstances attending our perception of the world outside ourselves. Failure to exercise the mind for Christ in these areas has become acute in the twentieth century. [Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994). Page 30-31]

7. Don't Rock the Boat

Have you ever been in a group of believers when someone asked a question that didn't have an easy answer? Disapproving glances were probably thrown at the questioner as if to say, "Don't you know we don't ask such questions here?" There is a tacit understanding within many churches and fellowship groups that this gospel ship navigates best if you don't rock the boat. Not having to think for ourselves in areas of faith frees us from the responsibility to integrate our faith with the world around us. A system which allows us to believe without thinking also allows us to sin without thinking, be entertained without thinking, vote without thinking, and generally follow the bent of the group. [Page 35]

8. Worship of Expertise

. . . specialization can be seen across all levels of society today-in the workplace, in technology, in the medical field, in education. Os Guinness calls it the "PhD-ing" of our species and institutions. Every human problem must be solved first by a study of experts who advance no further than the paper their reports are printed on. This worship of expertise is disabling society and proliferating schools that keep people dumb, a penal system that is counterproductive" and a legal system that merely lines the pockets of lawyers. [From an address by Os Guinness at the World Vision Washington Forum in Seattle, April 1996. Page 37]

9. Pastors as Theologians

Robert W. Jenson, professor of religion at St. Olaf College in Minnesota, is worried that even pastors are no longer doing the deep theological thinking required to keep the church on track, because theologians now specialize in such things. "In the ancient church," he says, "the theologians were the pastors of congregations." Today, he points out, theologians teach in seminaries, and pastors are busy with administration and counseling-tasks that professional therapists and businessmen in the congregation are much more qualified to do. Jenson concludes, "A pastor who is not a theologian is really quite a useless entity." [Robert W. Jenson, Mars Hill Tapes, #20, March/April 1996. Page 38]

10. Too Many Choices

A myriad of choices confronts the average American every day-choices of consumer products, clothes, music, movies, recreation, television channels, and food. In each category quality ranges from the discount mega-store to the connoisseur boutique, from Wal-Mart to Starbucks. It's enough to stagger the mind. Just try ordering a cup of coffee these days and notice what you're up against. Whole bean? Ground? Espresso? Latte? Cappuccino? Mocha? Decaffeinated? Regular? Cream? Soy milk? Sugar? Sweetener? It's enough to overwhelm anyone. [Page 39]

11. The Church Run by Specialists

Few of us feel personally responsible to articulate our faith even in church, much less in the marketplace. After all, the church is run by specialists. They, along with the writers of more books than anyone will ever read, are the spiritual somebody's who have this thing down pat. Leave it to them to grapple with the mysteries and ambiguities of faith. If we just go to church, we can all manage well enough. [Page 39]

12. The Idol of Success

We know that what is true doesn't necessarily "work," at least by popular definition. Ask Job, ask the martyrs, ask Paul in prison, ask Christ on the cross if believing God "works" and you are likely to get a different answer.

Nevertheless, pragmatic thinking has a strong grip on Christianity in America, just as it does on secular America. Hundreds of unknown pastors regularly attend growth conferences held by famous colleagues who are obviously successful, judging by the numbers of people in their congregations. Whatever they are doing is working and, therefore, is tantamount to truth, for the same reason the success seminar is true. But is it biblical? That's a question that may or may not be addressed at the conferences and even if it is, the biblical truth will probably not stand up as convincingly as the practical one. The Bible doesn't fare very well in America when it goes against what works. It is usually reinterpreted to agree with the practical, or is ignored altogether. We are brazen enough these days to bow to the pragmatic idol of success even with God

in the same room. [Page 46]

13. The Pain of Knowing God

The Book of Job does not have much to offer Christians geared toward the practical, unless all the pain- suffering, and loss Job went through is a means of gaining back double. This did happen to him, but is never mentioned as being connected to his pain. Job's suffering led him closer to a God he could not comprehend-a God who shut Job's mouth and stopped all his questions, not because he answered them, but because he spoke to Job and humbled him. Knowing God does not always make sense to our rational minds. Knowing God did not make Job's life better; for awhile it got much worse. [Page 51]

14. Less than Half of a School Day Is Spent on Academics

In his discussion of current trends in American education on the *Mars Hill Tapes*, Charles Sykes, Senior Fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research institute and author of *Dumbing Down Our Kids*, pointed out that only 41 percent of a high school student's class day is spent on the actual study of academics. The rest has to do with what are called "basic life skills" such as handling money? Self-esteem, and relationships-things that used to be taught in the home. [Page 54]

15. Little Time for Truth

The great American ideal of the pursuit of happiness has turned into a happiness to be achieved by entitlement, and schools must assist in the process. No longer interested only your education, schools have become social and therapeutic institutions, adjusting values and assuming the roles of nutritionist, nanny, and substitute parent. "Schools are failing, not for want of funding or order or hardware, but because school administrators have little time for the ideals of language, reason and truth." [Charles Sykes, *Mars Hill Tapes*, #19, January/February 1996, Charlottesville, VA. Page 55]

16. Teach Others to Learn for Themselves

... the sole true end of education is simply this: to teach men how to learn for themselves; and whatever instruction fails to do this is effort spent in vain. [Dorothy L. Sayers, *A Matter of Eternity*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973),13-5. Page 55]

17. Know a Little of Everything

Since we cannot be universal and know all that is to be known of everything, we ought to know a little about everything. For it is far better to know- something about everything than to than all about one thing. -- Blaise Pascal [Page 63]

18. Show Differences to Draw Attention to the Gospel

... there is not a Christian political party in America, and yet a majority of born-again Christians today tend to be Republicans. Why is this? Is there something more spiritual about the Republican party? Or is it that the Republican party lines up better on the few common denominator issues that push the average Christian's hot button? What about other issues? If a politician is against abortion, does that mean he or she is automatically right about everything else? What if a politician is for prayer in school but against programs to help the poor, something that God made sure the nation of Israel took care of and one of Christ's major concern?

If Christians were using their minds to make decisions about issues, seeking to make Christ the Lord of their political landscape? Wouldn't it be a greater witness to the world if they were? To see that Christians can disagree politically and yet agree about the gospel would, in fact, draw more attention to the gospel than to a particular party's agenda. [page 66]

19. We Often Employ Shallow Thought

A bumper sticker on a car in Denver reads, "How can God bless American if we kicked Him out of our schools?" Think about this. Who can kick God out of anything? If children can't pray out loud in schools, does that mean God no longer has access to the classroom? Is God licking his wounds and vowing he'll get even?" Is this the God we find anywhere in the scriptures? Seems more like Sylvester Stallone sulking in the corner of the room with a black eye and a split lip.

But some will buy this bumper sticker for its emotional impact. They will hear the argument and never question what the statement implies about the deeper aspects of the nature of God. Now most likely no one is consciously demeaning the nature of God just to make a point on their bumper; someone is simply not thinking. Two people, actually: the one who thought up the slogan and the one who stuck it on the bumper.

But more than two people are involved. What about those who read the bumper sticker and like it? What happens to their idea of God? Without even noticing it, they have lowered their image of God. (God is out to get those guys.) And what about non-Christians who read the bumper sticker and don't like it, further convincing themselves that they want to have nothing to do with a God who worries about being kicked out of elementary school? What appears to be a harmless, catchy slogan can do a great disservice to the truth. [page 71]

20. Do Our Own Thinking Where the Bible Is Silent

Francis Schaeffer wisely said that where the Bible is clear, we must be clear; but on issues that the Bible is silent, we must leave the door open for discussion and individual

leading by the Holy Spirit. To do anything more is to toy with legalism. That means we each have to do our own thinking and come to our own conclusions. The chances are quite good that we might end up in an argument with someone who comes to a different conclusion. [page 72-73]

27. We All See Only Part of the Truth

"For we know in part," says Paul (1 Cor 13:9), and this is why we disagree. Nobody knows completely. We all see only part of the truth, and to the extent that we do, we are partially right. When I close my mind to what someone else sees, especially a brother or sister in Christ who has the same Holy Spirit, I cease to grow in my understanding. I am impoverished when I hold onto my portion of truth, however true it might be, and refuse to listen to someone else's point of view. I am like the man who buries his talent and never finds out what is to be gained by investing it. [Page 73]

22. God Puts His Truth Where It Is Not Easy to Find

The Bereans examined what Paul said. They checked out his teachings with the Scriptures, and for this they were called noble in character-more noble than those in Thessalonica.

This nobility of critical examination recalls a verse in Proverbs where those who seek out the things of God are like kings on a quest, involved in a noble task. "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings" (25.2). God apparently puts his truth where it is not easy to find and then places a high priority on those who are desirous of going after it.

In Deuteronomy 29:29 we find, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." The truths God reveals to us are our privilege and our possession. The secret things have been entrusted to us and we are stewards of them (see I Cor 4:1). This is a high privilege and responsibility. [Page 75]

23. We Reject What We Cannot Understand

The human mind has a tendency to want to reject what it cannot understand. This is something Christians must learn to overcome for the simple reason that much of truth is paradox, or that which cannot be resolved in the human mind. Accepting paradox leads us to worship, when we realize our finitude and affirm God's incomprehensible wisdom. As Pascal wrote:

If there were no obscurity, man would not be sensible of his corruption; if there were no light, man would not hope for remedy. Thus, it is not only fair, but advantageous to us, that God be partly hidden and partly revealed; since it is equally dangerous to man

to know God without knowing his own wretchedness, and to know his own wretchedness without knowing God. [Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts and Minor Works* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son. 1959)" 192. Page 76]

24. God's Paradoxes

The free will and predestination controversy is probably the most famous. For every "Whosoever will may come" in the Bible, there is a corresponding "I have chosen you before the foundation of the world." "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you..." is another. How can two workings work together when one (ours) is not always conscious of the other? Then we think of the long string of biblical losers who win, the weak who are strong, the last will be first, the blind who see and the seeing who are really blind, the poor who are rich and the rich who are poor, and the end which is actually the beginning. I believe that those who can embrace a paradox have the most fun with truth. It's only when we free our minds of having to resolve everything that we can begin to enjoy something of the mystery and grandeur and even the humor of the gospel. [Page 76-77]

25. The God Who We Know

A simple faith is not simple because it has so few questions to answer; it is simple because it knows a God who can handle its many questions and the increasingly complex world in which it thrives. It's not what we know; it's who we know.

When I was a child, my family would take a long trip every summer from southern California to visit relatives and friends in Texas. We had a 1950 Ford, to which my father would attach a cylindrical cooler on the right front window to help us make it across the hot southwestern United States in August. He would also plan our trip to leave in the early evening so as to pass through the California desert in the cool of the night and arrive at our first stop in Arizona sometime the following morning.

My father drove the entire twelve hours himself... with my help, that is. By midnight the other three members of my family were fast asleep, but not me. These are, in fact, my earliest and fondest childhood memories-standing up on the front seat next to my father and having him all to myself. My eyelids were so wide open with wonder that they didn't even get heavy. You see, my father was a college professor, teaching mathematics and physics to big kids. That means when I asked him stuff about telephone poles and electricity and clouds and lighting and stars and planets and gravity and bug guts on the windows, he had answers. Did I go away from these sessions with fervor questions? No, always more. 'Was my universe more because I got answers to my questions? No. It was less so, because usually the answers were harder to understand than the questions. But what I did get was firm conviction of one thing: whatever question I had-whatever question existed in the whole spinning universe, for that matter-my father had the answer. Remove paradox and complexity and ambiguity

and uncertainly from your world view and you will miss the most important thing of all for a believer-moments like this with your heavenly Father.

Allowing for ambiguity and paradox in faith actually frees us to explore God's universe with an open mind. We don't have to resolve everything or connect all the dots. God's wisdom is not waiting to be proven by us; it does not need our ratification. Instead, it invites our discovery. It suggests that we come, see, explore. [Page 79-80]

26. We Need to be Renaissance People

We aren't required to know everything about everything. But if God is everywhere in his creation, as Scripture indicates and experience bears out, then knowing something about anything is a good beginning, and knowing something about everything is a commendable goal, even if it is always beyond our reach. Christians need to be Renaissance people. [Page 82]

27. Delved into and Examine God's Universe

The reformers called the natural sciences "the second book of God," and looked to it for the "hows" as they went to Scripture for the "whys." Most of the liberal arts colleges founded in the American colonies were Christian in orientation. Their purpose was to delve into God's universe and examine his ways. As in the earlier centuries of the Renaissance, much of the expansion of knowledge was accompanied by a sacred sense of exploring God's world. Today, we still call someone who dabbles in all subjects a Renaissance Men. [Michael S. Horton, *Beyond Culture Wars*, Chicago: Moody, 1994),78. Page 83]

28. God Obliterated the Line between Sacred and Secular

God created the world and called it good. He visited it numerous times and then actually took a human body and lived among us. Even in his resurrected form, he ate breakfast with his disciples and allowed them to touch his wounds. In fact, all of what God has done in human history" from Moses to the prophets to Christ to the eventual resurrection of our bodies, can be seen as a deliberate and calculated dismantling of the barriers between him and us that were erected as the result of our sin and disobedience. It was absolutely essential for our salvation that God embrace humanity in order to be a perfect sacrifice. In the process by implication, he sanctified human experience. God obliterated the line between sacred and secular when the Word became flesh and dwelled among us (see Ja 1:14). [Page 90-91]

29. Spirituality Is Expressed in Everyday Affairs

Everything we do as human beings is spiritually important. There is no sacred and secular. This does not mean merely that we see practical value in "secular" tasks like

peeling potatoes and washing the floor. It means far more: God himself delights in them because he has created the realm of the physical. Therefore, we are to value every part of our lives just as he does. In fact, spirituality is to be expressed primarily in the ordinary everyday affairs and relationships of our lives. [Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs *Being Human* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 55. Page 92]

30. Christ Did Not Require a Pristine Environment

Think of Jesus, the Son of God" who walked this earth for thirty-three years among pagans and whores and lepers and evildoers, yet without sin. He did not require a pristine environment to protect him. He did not hide his eyes from the world. He had a sanctified vantage point from which to view the world and the people in it. Jesus could take in the world without having it alter his own inner purity. Otherwise, he could never have come here. [Page 93]

31. God Is Sovereign All the Time

Is God sovereign only when and where he is acknowledged as God? Or is he God regardless? Trying to explain God's activity in the world becomes increasingly ridiculous without an understanding of God as the giver of life and talent to all men and women as a form of common grace. One star running back does a haughty end zone dance after a touchdown; another bows and prays. They are both excellent runners, and their abilities come from the same God. The pride of the one does not have to ruin our enjoyment of his finesse as a runner. We know where he got his giftedness, and we can praise God for what the human body is capable of doing. [Page 104-105]

32. Turn All We Do into the Spiritual

Truth belongs to God wherever it is found. When we recognize anything in the world as being true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, or worthy of praise, we can attribute it to God, and by that affirmation we can sanctify our experience of it. Our appreciation of life itself is holy as we discover God in it. When we can find something admirable in everything we do, we are finding God in our daily lives. Christians today do not need to spend more time away from the world to be holy. Instead, we need to train our minds to think about all of life in such a way as to make it holy. We do not need to do more spiritual things; we need to turn all at we are already doing into something spiritual. Brennan Manning has said, "Spirituality is not one compartment or sphere of life. Rather, it is a lifestyle: the process of life lived with the vision of faith." [Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child* (Colorado Springs:NavPress, 1994),48. Page [105-106]

33. Take What the Enemy Has Twisted, and Untwist It

There is only one true Creator, only one who can speak into the darkness and the void and cause a world to be, only one who can move upon the chaos and create order. He is the Lord God of Hosts. The rest of us can only mirror his creativity by arranging what he has already made in new and different ways. We create something out of something. We make charming quilts out of odd pieces of material. He creates something out of nothing. Though he pretends to be as powerful as God, the archenemy is merely one of God's creations like us. Though he wields considerably more power than you or I, this enemy is no match for God. He cannot create as God can; he can only twist. Satan has not created another world to vie with God's world, nor has he destroyed God's world. He took what God created as good and twisted it until it is slightly askew-until it gives glory to the created instead of the Creator. Our job, should we choose to accept it, is to take what the enemy has twisted and untwist it-to return it to its rightful position as that which gives glory to God. That is what Brother Lawrence did in his kitchen and that is where his joy came from.

This is what we can do with life, art, music, sports, food, fashion, gardening, the environment, and our many relationships. God wants us to sanctify the world, as we see it giving glory to him in all things. This is not only possible; it is essential. It is our mission in the world. [Page 109]

34. Develop a Good Eye

When a batter lets a close pitch go by and the umpire calls it a ball, that noisy guy behind home plate-you know, the one who looks over the umpire's shoulder, making him the umpire's umpire-cries out, "Good eye!" It was a bad pitch and a good eye caught what was bad about it.

Good batters have inexhaustible patience. They've studied up on the pitcher. They have an idea what he likes to throw in certain situations and they can "read" the ball coming off his hand or the certain twist of his elbow that gives away a fastball or a curve. A split second of recognition can be a huge advantage. Good hitters aren't lucky- they're knowledgeable and patient. The world is full of bad pitches, but Christians who have done their homework have learned how to develop a good eye. They know what they can use of what the world throws at them, and they know what to let go by. Jesus said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light" [Mt 6:22-23] Your God is whatever you pay attention to. Yes, we must pay attention to the world, but in doing so we pay attention to God, for in spite of its fallenness,

This is [still] my Father's world. He shines in all that's fair. In the rustling grass I hear him pass; he speaks to me everywhere. [Maltbie D. Babcock, *This Is Still Father's World*. Page 110]

35. Reexamine How We Think about Non-Christians

If we are going to represent the gospel to this culture, we need to realize that we start with a perception among non-Christians that is antithetical to our message. Non-Christians today think that many Christians are out to get them, not because they are lost and need to be found, not because they are lonely and need a friend, not because they are dying in their trespasses and sins and need to be saved, but because they are wrong and need to be either set straight or defeated. If we want to be sensitive to Christ and the gospel- we need to reexamine how we think about non-Christians. [Page 114-115]

36. God Loved Us to Save Us

In a culture war of issues, it is easy to forget that the world is made up of men and women for whom Christ died. It was because of the sin and lostness of humanity that Jesus came to redeem us-to buy us back with his own blood. He came because God loved his own and did not want to see us die in our trespasses and sins, a death that was nevertheless required by his holiness and justice. And so the death of Christ in our place made a relationship between the Creator and his creation possible. It was all motivated by love--God's love-his desire to save that which was lost. This is the central message of the gospel. [Page 115]

37. Not Wrong, But Lost

If we are concerned about getting the gospel out to the world, we will have to change our attitudes about the world. We need to see the world not so much as wrong as it is lost. More than anything else, this will influence the way we operate in the world. Christians must not participate in the attitudes of ideological and moral superiority that permeate our present society. [Page 115-116]

38. Be Patient with Non-Christians

Christians need to be more patient with non-Christians since they may be in the process of coming to know God. Paul said there are only two kinds of people: those who are being saved and those who are perishing (see 2 Cor 2:15). That means that a lot of non-Christians are in the process of being saved, and we (and they) don't know it yet. We need to patiently wait for this process, while we watch for the "teachings" of those who may be seeking God but are unwilling or unable to identify their search in our terms. [Page 124]

39. Not Pay for Our Sins Ourselves

When faced with their culture, and a myriad of sins he could have rightfully charged them with, he chose instead to start with the one thing he could affirm that would open

up a way for the message of the gospel.

There are so many things wrong with our culture today-so many things Christians could be distressed about; and yet, in light of every person's eternity and what Jesus has done for us all on the cross, these evils are not what we should be focusing on. Since Christ has already died for all of the sins the world could ever come up with, the issue is to let people know they do not have to pay for their sins themselves.

Some Christians today appear to be contradicting this attitude by gloating over the rise in AIDS among the homosexual community, as if these people are getting their just reward. What should be on the heart of every Christian is a compulsion to let dying people know that they don't have to pay what is due on their sins, since Jesus already paid it. This is the message of the gospel and what motivated Paul to look past the idols of Athens. Michael Horton has said it well, "I have always wondered why any homosexual would listen to us when we talk about AIDS as the judgment of God, musing at what a lucky thing it is for the rest of us that God does not hand out diseases for gossip, greed, or self-righteousness." [Horton, 34 Page 125]

40. With Non-Christian Changed Hearts, Are Christians happy?

A good attitude test for Christians today is to ask: What if God decided to suddenly save all the abortionists, gays and lesbians, militant feminists, and atheists who want to eradicate all signs of Christianity from public life? What if they suddenly showed up in church on Sunday with a soft heart toward God and a receptive ear to the gospel? Would we be overjoyed? Would we welcome them with open arms or would we go off and sulk? Jonah's problem was that he found his identity in being at odds with Nineveh; when God changed the heart of the city, Jonah was out of a job. I sometimes wonder if the church is opting for the same negative job description today. [Page 126]

41. We Need to Show the World God

We need to be good students of the world. We need to be aware of what the world is thinking, what it is looking for, and what it is worshipping. We need to be looking for opportunities to put a name on the unknown god that the world is worshipping in ignorance, and let them know, to their great surprise and joy, that he is no longer unknown. [Page 131]

42. Our Pseudo-piety

Paradoxically, what intrudes between God and human beings is our fastidious morality and pseudo-piety. It is not the prostitutes and tax-collectors who find it most difficult to repent. Brennan Manning [Manning, 82. Page 134]

43. Forgiveness of Our Wrongness

The world is not wrong as much as it is lost, and we Christians may be wrong more than we know. Our unyielding hold on our own self-righteousness and self-proclaimed superiority keeps us from effectively representing the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world. We do not see ourselves accurately. For too long, we have tried to draw people to Christ by showcasing our rightness, when all along the good news of Christ's forgiveness of our wrongness is the real message. [Page 135]

44. The World Doesn't Care about Our Standards

This testimony by dissimilarity is a rewrite of the Scriptures:

By this shall all men know that you are my disciples,

by the music you don't listen to,
by the movies you don't watch,
by the beverages you don't drink,
by the dances you don't participate in,
by the stand you take on all of these things, and mostly
by your impeachable, impeccable conduct.

The question no one ever asked was, "Who cares?" We know the world doesn't, because these things are not important to them. Or, if they are, it's for different reasons. For instance, plenty of non-Christians don't drink. Is that supposed to make everyone want to know what's different about them? It's their choice if they don't want, in drinking in this postmodern world of countless choices. No one even bothers to ask.

I figured it out the other day. Christians are the only ones who care about this. Those testimonies we gave that were supposed to change the world? Well, we were in church when we gave them, talking to people who already believed. The world wasn't there to hear is. We were talking to each other, telling each other how important it was to be different and finding comfort in being able to clearly define our differences. [Page 138-139]

45. Having a Good View of Jesus

When Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8), he was not talking about how he was no longer going to be around and now needed his disciples to bear witness that He had been among them and tell what he had accomplished while he was there. A witness was simply someone who saw something. A good witness had a good view of what happened. In this light, the best witnesses were most likely the people who were the most poorly behaved or the most unfortunate--the prostitutes and tax-collectors and lepers and demon-possessed. They got the closest view of Jesus, such as the woman with an issue of blood who managed by faith to touch his garment in a crowd

and experience the power of its healing strength flow through her body. Or the leper who was touched and healed by Jesus, even though he was a proclaimed "untouchable." These were the best witnesses for Christ. The poor witnesses were the ones who didn't have a good view of what really happened like the Pharisees and Sadducees and leaders of the synagogues. The worst witnesses were those who never had a life-changing encounter with Jesus. [Page 141-142]

46. Not Forget That We Also Were without Christ

We've said that the gospel is for everyone, but we've acted as if it were just for us. We've cut ourselves off from that which makes us common with the rest of the world. Christians have cultivated an image that has nothing to do with sin and, thus, nothing to do with sinners. We have distanced ourselves from the world and taken on a form of spiritual pride. It's a sad day for the gospel when it is seen as good news only for good people.

For the sake of the gospel, it is time to show the world how very much the same we are. It's time to join Paul on the "worst of sinners" list. Yes, the Apostle Paul would put himself right in the middle of the world for which Christ died. In fact, he felt he was more of a sinner than the next guy, and less deserving of God's grace than any one. "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst" (1 Tm 1:15). Sounds like Paul is at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, doesn't it? "Hi, guys, I'm Paul and I'm a sinner--the worst"--a claim that would have been contested by other members present, convinced of their own bent to sinning.

Every believer should be absolutely convinced" beyond the shadow of a doubt, of being the worst sinner on the face of the earth. Worst there is, was" and ever will be. No contest. And if this is not the case, if there is any inkling: of a thought that somebody out there might be worse than I am, then there is reason to believe that I have not yet done adequate business with God about my own sin. The great hymnwriters thought this way. Their salvation continually astonished them. Our hymnals portray their amazement. Consider lines like, "Amazing love! How can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!" No, this is not merely "die for me," as in a theological doctrine, this is "die for me," as in wonder that out of all the people in the world, he would have included me--in this case, Charles Wesley--the worst of the lot. Phillip Bliss, another hymnwriter, makes it even clearer when he concludes that "Jesus loves even me." There's a wealth of meaning in that one word "even." Even me, the lowest, the least deserving, the worst. Or, Charles Wesley again, this time writing, "Tis mercy all, immense and free, for, O my God, it found out me!" His implication is, "God's mercy had to look really hard because I was a long way off!" These hymnwriters placed themselves in a camp with the world. Yes, they were saved out of the world, but they never left it and never forgot who they were without Christ I believe this is what Paul meant when he said, "I am the worst"--present tense. He knew himself. He knew one

thing separated him from the next guy: Jesus Christ and his death on Paul's behalf. The next guy either didn't know yet, or didn't get it. Either way, Jesus was the only difference. [Pages 142-143]

47. All Saved by Grace

When I finally saw myself as the worst of sinners--as one of the sinners I used to condemn- -the gospel made sense. Up until then, I didn't understand why Christ died. I sometimes imagine this scene: I'm sitting down to eat at the marriage supper of the Lamb and look across the table at some scoundrel I never suspected to see there. "How did you get here?" I will say, to which he will reply "Same way you did, friend." [Page 144]

48. Eyes Clear of Logs in Own Eyes

When I was a kid attending Christian camp, we used to end the week with what was then called--and this is the truth--a fagot service. This name came from an English word which means "a bundle of sticks or twigs bound together." The service consisted of a fellowship time outdoors around a campfire where campers would take a stick from the bundle, throw it on the fire, and give their 'testimony'. When I reached high school, my peers and I knew that a similar word was used as a derogatory reference to a male homosexual. Every time someone mentioned a "fagot service" we snickered. In my mind now this scene is thick with the rank irony of throwing a "fagot" on the fire of our glowing spiritual testimonies while bundles of sticks clogged our eyes.

Let's institute a new service, fueled not by the sticks of judgment, but by the planks pulled from our own eyes. Let's turn away from the fire and wish clear eyes embrace a world full of people we once condemned. Christians can bring healing in society-but only when our eyes are clear of judgment and prejudice; when we see everyone as someone for whom Christ died, when we treat every person, no matter how sinful, as one who might be in the process of being saved; and when we remember that we are "the worst of sinners." [Page 146]

49. Prepare Minds for Action

"Therefore, prepare your minds for action..." (1 Pt 1:13)" and we are reminded again of the necessity of using our minds. And yet our minds are not for thinking only; they are also for action. Peter wants to send Christians off into a fragmented society with their minds set on doing good. The centrality of this positive activity in the world is impossible to miss. Throughout Peter's letter, we can hear echoes of Jesus' words: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Jn ,5:16). Listen to Peter:

Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God (2:12). For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men (2:15). Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? (3:13)... keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously of your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (3:16).

Peter sought a reputation that turn critics into those who glorify God. [Page 152-153]

50. Moral Arm of Society?

To listen to Christian talk radio these days is to hear a great deal of outrage from Christians trying to gain lost cultural around by playing the part of the angry minority. Themes against abortion, gay rights, sex education, and the outlawing of prayer in schools dominate the Christian airwaves. Some Christians acting as the moral arm of society are trying to wage war in the legislative halls of Washington and the front doors of abortion clinics, instead of in the heavenly realms where Paul put the battle (see Eph 6:12). We misuse Scripture when we use the language of spiritual warfare in the context of social morality. These open appeals to resentment and warfare without a spiritual context and sound teaching are extremely dangerous to the Christian body. They incite attitudes that are far from the forgiveness that Christ exhibited on the cross. [Page 154]

51. A Message of Loving Service

In a fragmented society where not everyone speaks the same language, everyone understands a message of loving service. A cup of cold water offered in the name of Jesus needs no translation. Peter wanted Christians in Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia to have a reputation for making their towns better places in which to live. That point was to silence the critics of the gospel by the contributions Christians were making in their communities.

What if a businessman criticized Christians and then found out that the Little League coach who spent extra time instilling confidence in his son was a Christian? What if a social activist condemned Christians but kept running into them working overtime at the social agencies in town? What if a working mother put down Christians and then found that her children's favorite schoolteacher was a Christian? What if a homosexual spent his whole life bashing Christians, and then discovered that one of them visits him regularly, now that he's dying with AIDS? What if a CEO tried to put down Christians, and then discovered a respected leader in the Chamber of Commerce is a Christian and a noted philanthropist in the community?

Peter wants Christians to have a reputation that lends credibility to the gospel. He wants them to be not only bearers of the gospel but doers of good deeds, so that nothing will stand in the way of the message of the gospel. "Who is going to harm you if

you are eager to do good?" (1 Pt 3:13). [Page 156-157]

52. When Christian Reputations Are Bad, the Gospel Suffers

The gospel of Jesus Christ is all about saving the lost. When any agenda becomes more important than this, we are really saying that something else is more important than people perishing eternally. Nothing is that important, we are representatives of Christ, Christ's ambassadors, in fact, "as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:20). If we are turning off the world through an antagonistic attitude, we are cutting off their primary access to God. This is not just a matter of priorities; we are talking about the eternal destiny of the souls of men, women, and children, and our responsibility as stewards of the good news of Jesus Christ.

We need to do something to redeem our reputation in the world right now, because it is not good; and whenever the reputation of Christians suffers, the gospel suffers. What can we do? Peter has told us. Get out into the world and do good. [Page 157-158]

53. Jesus Is Outside the Camp

If I know Jesus, he's already "left the building" of the Christian subculture. We had our fifteen minutes of fame (ala Andy Warhol) and now there's other work to be done. This is the way it is with Jesus--he's outside the camp. He's in the world seeking someone who will represent his cause. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (see Jn 3:17). If the Christian subculture exists primarily to condemn the world, you can be sure that Jesus is not having any part of it. [Page 159]

54. Be Active in Introducing Others to the Heavenly Kingdom

Christians need to care about their communities through the Parent Teachers Association, community action groups, sports and recreation programs, the chamber of commerce, and as contributors to the art--filling positions from workers to board members with those who know and love Jesus Christ. As Christians, we belong to both a heavenly and an earthly kingdom, and it will be our commitment to the earthly one that will give us opportunity to introduce people to the heavenly kingdom. [Page 161]

55. Doing Nothing

Nobody makes a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little. -- Edmund Burke [Page 166]

56. Bringing the Peace of God to the World

Unfortunately, fear and anger are rampant in Christian circles today. We seem to be about even with the world when it comes to the fear quotient. Indeed, we're so afraid that we're mad. We've got clout now, and we're going to do something about it. We need to ask ourselves a few questions.

Do we want a moral society because we are genuinely concerned about the quality of life for every human being? Or, is it that a more moral society means a more safe society--safer for us to carry on our lives with less encroachment from the pagan element? If so, we are grossly misunderstanding the gospel. Jesus did not come to make the world safe: he came to save it, and there is a world of difference between the two. In our overwhelming desire to be safe, we have taken up the world's solutions and are losing our opportunity to bring the peace of God to the world through Christ. [Page 177-L77]

57. Impacting Society from the Inside

It's easier to set ourselves apart than it is to set apart Christ as Lord in us, but this is how we can impact society from the inside. It will not happen through the combined strength of Christians banding together to control the world or its institutions, but by individuals taking up positions in the world with Christ as Lord in their hearts--a sort of holy infiltration. God does not want us ruling the world from a power base of worldly influence. He wants us in the world with his rule established in our hearts. As is often the case, we turn this inside out. We would like our subculture to be our control center from which we keep the world at bay and rule it at the same time. Christ wants the center of control to be in each one of us where he rules, while we are scattered out in the world like granules of salt. [Page 174]

58. The Art of Persuasion

We have opted for the power of politics, trying to accomplish what only God can do, by becoming Lord in people's hearts. This is why, for the sake of the gospel, we must lay down the rhetoric of political power and pick up the art of persuasion. Persuasion is civil and gracious. It respects the mind of the other and does not force anything on anyone. In persuasion, the power goes into the argument, not at the person. It bears weight on a person only if the argument is weighty and the individual is open enough to hear it. It is the truth, well-articulated by believers who are already in the marketplace, that should weigh on the souls of men and women" not the force of political legislation. We are bearers of the gospel message, not of God's will for society. [Page 175-176]

59. Overcoming Evil with Good

One of the ways to overcome evil with good is to respect those we encounter in the world, even if they are antagonistic to the gospel. God has given every human being the choice of seeking him as God or making their own idol to worship. If we are going to

respect everyone as made in the image of God, we must respect also their right to believe what they choose. We are not here to crush people, to prove them wrong; or to force them into corners with our superior arguments. We are here to give a reason for our hope to anyone who asks us why we are so hopeful when the world is so hopeless. [Page 180]

60. The Gospel Goes to the Ends of the Earth

It is not in the interest of spreading the gospel that God's people be a sequestered ethnic group any longer. The great message of the gospel is intended to go to the ends of the earth. To accomplish that, the people of God must be found in all cultures, eating and drinking, enjoying music and art, and making tools with those who do not yet know the gospel. – Kenneth A. Myers [Page 185]