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**Following Jesus: The Six Challenges**

**Challenge Two: The challenge of worldly ways**

**By Pastor Chris Cleary**

**Romans Chapter 12 verses 1 – 2**

1. **Introduction**

I want to start by stating that **I do not believe that everything in the world is bad or is a danger to Christians.** The world is full of beauty, love, kindness, family, friendship, community, fun, laughter, art, music, film, theatre, , , **and much more that is good, wholesome and beneficial to mankind.** Yet, some will tell you this is **an entirely evil world** and we should all **tread the earth with suspicion, fear, dread, worry,** and, **if possible, keep ourselves away from the influences of the world - as much and as often as we can!**

**I refuse** to believe that or live my life in that way **- I choose Christ;** and **I** **Dare to Be Different as I live out my life in the world!**

**And my I remind you – a world which God loves so very much - along with all of the people in it!**

However, in 1965, **Dr Martyn Loyd-Jones,** the great Welsh, evangelical minister of the last century, preached at Westminster Chapel, London on the subject of **“When the church becomes like the world.”**

His conclusion was that when this happens **the gospel message is eclipsed and people will not see it or hear it!**

**Today,** as then, **we find the church often bending to the desires and the thoughts of the world.** Some church leaders argue that the message must change or **else become irrelevant.** Dr. Lloyd-Jones argued that **that very thinking was conforming to the world,** and He argued that **Christians are not to conform to the world.**

The great tragedy today is **not that the devil is controlling the world but that Christians are looking to the world for answers,** and that theology **may well move us further and further from being the Church that Christ intended us to be.**

1. **Dare to Be Different**

**Verse 2 - “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”**

By **faith,** the **transformation of our mind**, and **through our actions,** we can **Dare to Be Different** - knowing it’s for the good of God and ourselves.

To **‘Dare’** means to **‘have the courage to do something’.** In **Romans Chapter 12 verses 1 and 2,** The Holy Spirit (through Paul) tells us to be **transformed.**

**Transformed so that we do not follow the ways of the world,** which would be so easy to do, but **instead we follow the ways of Jesus** and seek to live a life **that personally,** **and as a Church,** models itself on God’s ways and intentions.

However, **we do live in the world** and we interact and engage with the world all of the time. The challenge is to **seek to understand** the world, its values philosophies, culture, ways, and actions – **so we can better impact on the world through our lives and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

In one of the **few** excellent books I have read on business and management is one by **Steven Covey**, an American educator, author and speaker. His book, **The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,** helped me enormously throughout my career in business and management, and continues to do so in my life today, including my role as Pastor. The **‘Habit’** that impacted on me most was **- Seek ye first to understand and then to be understood.**

**I do not wish to conform to the ways of the world which are not of God,** but I need to understand those who see things differently than me so that I can hopefully be understood by them.

I need to explain myself in a way that they will be able to relate to – just as Jesus had to with His approach and methods all those years ago. **He sought to understand people, their lives and their thinking and feeling – once He did – He could get through to them without compromising His Way – God’s Way.**

**Verse 2 - “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”**

1. **If Worldliness Comes in – What Goes Out?**

Do you ever think - **“why is it that so few non-believers want to become Christians?”**

**I might shock you by saying - well, why should they?**

When they look at the church today **they often do not see or hear anything different in the churches than what they see outside. Why would they want to come to Christ? Why would they see the need for any sort of change?**

The sad truth is this: instead of leading the world, far **too often the church just slavishly and uncritically follows the world.**

* If the world does something, you can almost be assured that **sooner or later the church will do it.**
* If the world believes and promotes something, **eventually the church will end up believing and promoting it.**

**In the 60s and 70s,** two books, albeit written before those decades, were beginning to have a very big influence on vast numbers of people across the world. These two books were [***The Communist Manifesto***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Communist_Manifesto)***of 1848 -*** (**Marx and Engels)** and ***The***[***Humanist Manifesto***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanist_Manifesto) ***of 1933, and 1973 –* (Roy Wood Sellars and Raymond Bragg)**

**Francis August Schaeffer**, the well-respected American [evangelical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelicalism), theologian, pastor and [philosopher](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_philosophy), had a tremendous concern that the Church was more and more following the world. In ***1981 he wrote, A Christian Manifesto.*** It was intended as a Christian answer to the previously mentioned books.

Francis Schaeffer made the following remark, **“Tell me what the world is saying today, and I’ll tell you what the church will be saying in seven years.”**

* The world pushes the “**look after No. 1”** agenda, so the church slavishly follows suit.
* The world pushes the **“lust for fame and fortune”** approach, so the church slavishly follows suit.
* The world pushes “**entertainment and amusements”,** so the church slavishly follows suit.
* The world pushes “**celebrities and marketing techniques”,** so the church slavishly follows suit.
* The world pushes **feelings and emotions** while downplaying the mind, so the church slavishly follows suit.
* The world pushes evolutionary humanism, so the church slavishly follows suit.

We could easily continue to add to that list today, **but just stop already!**

We need to get off the world’s bandwagon and **get back on to Christ and on to his Word.**

**We need to live, think and act like a follower of Jesus Christ instead of a follower of the world.**

I have been influenced by many great theologians and Christian writers over the years, and **these three top my list.** So, let me conclude by sharing what they had to say on this subject.

**Dwight L. Moody**, **Evangelist** - “You cannot mix the worship of the true God with the worship of any other god more than you can mix oil and water. It cannot be done. There is no room for any other throne in the heart if Christ is there. **If worldliness should come in, godliness would go out.”**

**Charles Spurgeon, Pastor and Preacher** - “I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world, **is because the world has so much influence over the church.”**

**G. K. Chesterton, Author and Christian Apologist -** “We do not want a church that **will move with the world.** We want a church that **will move the world.”**

**Verse 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.”**

**The challenge of worldly ways.**

**They must not replace God’s ways in our lives and the life of the church:**

* **we must resist**
* **we must stand firm**
* **we must Dare to Be Different!**

**Amen**