

LOST IN A LOST WORLD

Three years ago we did a series called The Complaint Department. I asked you about your biggest complaints with yourself, your marriage, your friendships, the church. And I asked you what was your biggest problem with the culture.

On that last one,
None of you said,
“What are you talking about, Rob?
There’s nothing wrong with our culture.
I think everything is going quite swimmingly
in postmodern, 21st century America.”

All of you sensed something is wrong – really wrong –
with where we are.

Your number one answer was:
The culture we live in is wack.

Ok, none of you used the word “wack,”
but that’s the best term I could come up with
to summarize your comments.

Wack: Crazy, strange, nuts, really messed up, just plain wrong.

Here are some of the individual complaints you listed,
each one receiving multiple mentions

Technology.
The way it is damaging our relationships
and the way we communicate with each other.

In particular, social media that is supposed to bring us together,
but that so often pushes us apart.

In fact, it allows people to attack, bully and vilify each other,
often anonymously.

Self-centeredness.

That was another complaint.

Here you mentioned:

materialism, hedonism, a sense of entitlement, people too easily offended,
people focused on getting their rights instead of fulfilling their
responsibilities.

Others of you bemoaned the fact that our culture is characterized by

Polarization.

People on both sides are fanatical about their beliefs.

No one wants to compromise,

there is little civility, and

people are willing to make personal attacks on their opponents
just because they have different views.

Another complaint was:

Moral relativism.

I was really impressed one of you even used that term.

“Moral and cultural relativism.”

Somebody else wrote:

“Anything goes, there is no behavior that cannot be rationalized.”

And one of you wrote:

“We’re so willing to accept anything as ok.

No backbone to challenge things that are wrong.”

Many of you stated that you were concerned about an

Antagonism Towards Christianity.

Not just that we are becoming a godless society,
but there is real animus towards the Christian faith and
towards Christian believers.

You wrote:

The culture is daily becoming more hostile to Judeo-Christian values.

People of faith are portrayed as ignorant and judgmental.

Cultural ridicule of Christians.

If Christians speak out against something, we are ostracized.

If someone speaks out against Christianity, they are heroes.

Put it all together and

the culture is wack,

things are messed up, and

it seems that the whole world has gone crazy.

That was three years ago,

and I'm assuming few, if any of us,

think that things have gotten better.

One of you looked at all of this,

and had a very good word for us.

A challenge really.

“Too many of us do not positively engage to change the culture for the better
instead of being negative critics from the sidelines.”

That leads to what I want to talk about this evening/morning.

Are we going to be satisfied with wringing our hands and saying how bad
things are?

Or are we going to do something about it?

Will we be content to curse the darkness?
Or will we find a way to light a candle?

We're going to tackle this topic a little differently than we usually do.
We're going to look at a large passage of Scripture
and see how it applies to us, our culture and the response we need to make.

Let's start with

2 Timothy 3.1-5.

As we read this passage, remember what you said is wrong with our culture.
Self-centeredness, materialism, hedonism, more concerned about individual rights
and recognition than responsibilities to the community and to others,
polarization, moral relativism, attacks on the Christian faith.

2 Timothy 3.1-5: You must understand that in the last days there will come times
of much trouble. People will love themselves and money. They will be full of
pride and tell of all the things they have done. They will speak against God.
Children and young people will not obey their parents. People will not be
thankful, and they will not be holy. They will not love each other. No one can
get along with them. They will tell lies about others. They will not be able to
keep from doing things they know they should not do. They will be wild and
want to beat and hurt those who are good. They will not stay true to their
friends. They will act without thinking. They will think too much of themselves.
They will love pleasure instead of loving God. They will have the appearance of
godliness, but they will not have its power.

Any of that sound familiar?
Not a bad summary of what you wrote
in your complaints about the culture we live in.

The phrase that Paul uses early in this passage
“in the last days”
can have two meanings.

It can refer to the time immediately before Christ returns to earth.
But it can also refer to the entire time between birth of Jesus and
his second coming.

For example, here's how the book of Hebrews begins.

Hebrews 1.1-2: In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but **in these last days** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

The author of Hebrews says he and his readers are in the last days which were inaugurated in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Which meaning does Paul have in mind when he writes to Timothy?
The time immediately before the return of Christ
or the entire period that began with the coming of Jesus
and will culminate with his return?

Commentators disagree,
but I lean towards the latter.
That's because in the following verses
Paul tells Timothy how to deal with the people he has just described.
And if that's the case,
he is describing the culture of his time.

Normally what commentators conclude is this.
What Paul is describing as the cultural reality of his time
will continue and will **intensify** as the return of Christ comes closer.
So, we shouldn't be surprised that our culture is the way it is.

Because of The First and Second Great Awakenings
and later revivals,
our culture in The United States was greatly impacted
by the Christian faith.

Christians in this country enjoyed what you could refer to as
“home field advantage.”

In general, Christian beliefs and values
were widely held from the planting of the colonies
until the 1960’s.

There were skeptics in every period,
but in the past thir views were a minority opinion held by intellectual elites
with little impact on the masses and their beliefs.

Most people,
even many of those who were not professing Christians,
viewed the church as an important part of American life
and respected its moral teachings.

That’s been changing and it will continue to change.
Barring a miracle,
the trajectory is that traditional, Bible-believing Christians in the U.S.
are going to find themselves more and more
objects of ridicule, discrimination and possibly persecution.

But what I want you to see is this:
Where we are may not be pleasant
but it is not atypical or unusual.
The things you listed as problems with our culture
have been the same problems and challenges
Christians have had to deal with since the time of Paul.

They may appear different because of technology and social media,
but it’s really the same:
Hedonism, materialism, the rejection of godly values and antagonism towards
the Christian faith and those who promote it.

For a couple of centuries we Christians in the US
 have had it relatively easy.
 But it's getting worse.

So, how are we to respond?

1. Know the Truth.

Let's jump down in this same passage to

2 Timothy 3.14-17: But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Paul tells Timothy,
 you better know for sure what you believe
 and why you believe it.
 And I'll tell you the same thing.

Before we can do anything to help our culture,
 we better be grounded and rooted in the truth
 that is revealed in the Scriptures.

There is going to be immense pressure on Christians
 to go along with the culture.
 It will try to confuse you about what's true;
 it will attempt to influence you to accept what it values, and
 it will make every effort to intimidate you to compromise
 what you believe
 so that you are a cultural Christians rather than a biblical Christian.

A cultural Christian is someone who believes in Jesus
 but thinks like the world.

And if you don't know what the faith is;
if you don't know what the Scriptures teach;
that's what you'll become.

If your understanding of what Jesus revealed goes little deeper than
God is nice and we should be, too –
you'll give in.

And you and your thinking and your worldview
will be just as wack as the culture,
except worse because you claim to follow Jesus.

If you don't know the Scriptures,
you'll cave to the culture when you're told
that the Christian faith is narrow-minded and mean-spirited.

As the pressure to conform becomes more intense,
cultural Christians will give in to the culture and its values.
They will think they are doing so because they are loving and accepting;
but in reality, it is because their faith is weak and uninformed.

So, the first and most important thing you can do
is get into the word and get the word into you.

The Scriptures will make you,
Paul's language, again,
"wise unto salvation."

They will teach you
what is right and true,
how to see the world and its values, and
what is essential for the followers of Jesus to hold onto.

2. Do Not Become Argumentative.

When the world changes around us,
 when our views and our way of life is called into question and attacked,
 when we feel threatened,
 it is normal to become angry and argumentative.

Paul tells us in this same letter to Timothy,
 that's not the way to help our culture.

2 Timothy 2.23-26: Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

The Lord's servant – that's you and I –
 we must not be quarrelsome or argumentative.

Question:

When has someone argued you into changing your views?

When has someone who let you know that he
 thought your views were foolish and stupid –

when has someone like that ever caused you to change your beliefs
 and accept his?

So why do you think that getting angry and triggered
 and arguing about all kinds of nonessential issues
 will change someone whom you disagree with?

Paul tells Timothy

Don't be quarrelsome or resentful.

Don't get annoyed or angry that people believe differently than you do
 or that they attack you and your views.

Instead be what?
Kind and gentle.

To your opponents –
that's who Paul is talking about.
Not just to other Christians,
but to those who oppose you.
Be kind and gentle.

We don't get to think,
“This used to be a nice, God-fearing Christian country
and now some punks are trampling all over it.”
And it really irritates us
and we want to tell them,
“‘Get off my lawn.’
Your views are stupid.
You're a bunch of idiots.
And I'm sick and tired of your being on in my yard.’”

Paul tells Timothy,
we can't be like that.
We can't be angry or violent with people who disagree with us,
not with our actions or our words or our attitudes.
With those who oppose us we are to be just the opposite –
kind and gentle.

James wrote:

James 1.19-20: My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

When people disagree with you and your views –
your theological views or your views about the culture –
the right response is to listen.

Listening shows that I respect you and your thinking.
It indicates that I think you are worthy of my time.

Many people who are angry with the Christian faith
have been hurt by Christians.
And dealing with another angry Christian who is put out with them
because they don't think the way we do –
that will just confirm what they already believe:
Christians are judgmental and close-minded.
We're never going to win people to Jesus that way.

We are not going to out-argue people into the kingdom.
We're never going to outsmart them into the kingdom.
We're never going to out-shout somebody into the kingdom.
We are going to out-love people into the kingdom.

The first thing to do when people challenge your faith is
to ask questions and then to listen.

It could be as simple as, "Why do you think that?"
Or, "How do you know that for sure?"

Or questions like:

What makes you think that morals are relative?
How do you find meaning in a universe that has no meaning –
a universe that is nothing more than time plus chance plus matter?
If there is no universal moral truth,
how can you be sure my views are wrong?
How do you think the universe got here?

And if they answer you,
 don't respond much more than,
 "Hmm, interesting.
 I'm going to think about that and
 maybe we can talk later."

People want to be respected.
 People want to be heard.
 And if you're the person doing that,
 it's likely that they will continue the conversation.

Look again how this passage begins.

2 Timothy 2.23: Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments,
 because you know they produce quarrels.

Stick to what's most important.

Getting someone to come to your views and love or hate Donald Trump,
 that's not going to get that person into the Kingdom of God.
 Getting someone to believe
 the world was created in seven literal days or
 evolution is a myth or
 Jonah was swallowed by a big fish –
 these are really interesting questions.

But these are not essential questions.
 Real, born-again, Bible-believing Christians differ on these issues.
 They are not salvation matters.

It's ok to argue about them with other believers,
 but don't do it with nonbelievers.
 All that matters for them is coming to faith in Jesus –
 he is the unique Son of God,
 he is human and divine,
 he died on the cross for our sins
 and he rose on the third day.

Do not argue about nonessentials.

At times,

when someone has wanted to debate with me about other parts of the Bible,
I have asked them,

“If I can answer that question for you,
are you ready to accept Jesus?”

If they say “no”,

then I ask, “What questions do I need to answer that are keeping you from
accepting him?”

Stay focused on the essentials.

Don't become quarrelsome.

Don't focus on winning the argument

or convincing someone that his or her lifestyle is wrong.

Focus on developing a relationship

and caring for the other person.

3. Realize We are on a Mission Field.

I hope I can make this concept clear.

In the past we have thought we have a mission.

We are here to bring people to Jesus.

And that's true.

But that's different from how I want you to start seeing yourself.

You are not just a man on a mission.

You are a man on a mission field.

Go to a mission field

and you don't expect people to think or act like Christians.

India, China, Middle East.

You know they have different beliefs.

You know they have different values.

You expect them to see the world differently than you do.

But it doesn't bother you.
They're not Christians
so you don't expect them to believe or behave like Christians.

Here's what I want you to get.
You are on a mission field right here in the good ol' USA.

Stop expecting people to share your beliefs or your values.
More and more people have never been in a church.
They've never heard enough about Jesus
to accept him or reject him.

Of course,
their values are different.
Of course,
their sexual ethics are different.
Of course,
where they look for meaning and happiness is different.

Look, and I don't mean this in a judgmental way,
these folks are lost.
Most of you won't remember the old Moody Blues song,
"Lost in a Lost World."

But the people whose views and whose behaviors
get us so irritated – many of them,
they are lost in a lost world.
And it's this lost world that has told them
who they are,
what's important, and
how they should live.

And rather than anger,
we should feel compassion for them.

From Lost in a Lost World, Mike Pinder

I woke today, I was crying Lost in a lost world
So many people are dying Lost in a lost world
Some of them are living an illusion
Bounded by the darkness of their minds

Thinking only of themselves
They shun the light
They think they're right
Living in their empty shells

Everywhere you go you see them searching
Everywhere you turn you feel the pain
Everyone is looking for the answers
Well, look again; come on, my friend
Love will find us in the end
Come on, my friend
We've got to bend
Down on our knees and say a prayer

Oh, can you see the world is pining?
Pining for someone who really cares enough to share his love
With all of us so we can be
An ever-loving family
Have we forgotten who loves who?

Pinder isn't a Christian,
but that song is.
I mean it's exactly who we should see the people around us.
Lost in a lost world,
living in pain,
searching for answers,
pining for someone who cares enough to love them.

2 Timothy 2.24-26: The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

You've heard me talk about going into a Hindu temple in India.
I watched as a mother had her two sons kneel with her
and offer a plate of fruit to an idol of the Monkey God.
That's how Hindus often refer to him.

Here's a picture.

There they were worshipping a false deity,
Lord Hanuman.
That's his name.
Lord.
Hanuman.
A competitor, a rival
to my Lord Jesus Christ.

Asking him for blessing and protection and life.
You don't feel anger when you see that do you,
not against that mother and her sons.
Your heart breaks for them.
They are lost in a lost world,
needing life and looking for it at the feet of a monkey god.

When you're on a mission field,
you don't get angry at people for who they are or how they live.
You weep for them,
you feel compassion for them,
you pray for them.

Because you know that what Paul wrote is true.
 They have been trapped,
 taken captive by the powers of darkness and ignorance.

Listen,
 you are on a mission field.
 And the people who bother you –
 how they look,
 what they think,
 who they have sex with,
 the values they live by –
 they need Jesus.

And the right response is not anger or revulsion –
 the right response is compassion and concern.
 Remember that you are on a mission field
 and that will be much easier to do.

4. Live Your Faith.

What does Paul tell Timothy?

2 Timothy 2.22: Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Even before Paul tells Timothy not to argue,
 he tells him to live a life of righteousness, faith, love and peace.

That is the ultimate apologetic.
 It's the most convincing way of promoting the faith
 and changing the culture.
 People see there is a better way to live
 because of the life they see you living.

Roman Empire

Norma McCorvey

I'm convinced

the only way we will impact our culture significantly is
to believe that when people see a better way of life,
when people see Christians whose lives are about love and compassion
and service,

when the one thing that a secular society knows about Christians is not that we
are judgmental,

or angry,

or condemning

or arrogant and self-righteous,

or that we vote a certain way –

but when the one thing they know about us for sure is that we are a community of
compassion,

and that we care more and love more

and serve more and sacrifice more

than anyone else on the planet –

I think then people will listen to us.

I want to encourage you –

I want to challenge you –
find a way to serve.

The last, the least, the lost.

Those that others don't care about.

Those that no one cares about but God.

The widow, the orphan.

The poor, the homeless, the vulnerable.

When we do that,

people will see a life that looks like life.

People will see Jesus.

And if people can see Jesus,

they will be drawn to him.

And lost people will be saved

and a culture just might be changed.

I'm convinced then and only then
will we get our culture to listen to our claim that Jesus Christ is Lord and
Savior who can connect lost souls to God and bring life out of death.

And I have a dream that one day that's how we'll be known.

Our culture is wack.
We do need to critique its values and speak about the things that are wrong.

But we aren't against people.
Even those who have bought into the culture.
We are for people.
All people.
Because our God is.

And his desire is that they will
come to their senses,
come to a knowledge of the truth, and
escape from the trap of the devil,
who has taken them captive to do his will.