

Take a moment and identify a couple controversial issues in society today. Write them down on the back of this guide or on a scrap piece of paper, then consider where you stand on the issue. For example, some are worried that Elon Musk's purchase of Twitter will change things so that disinformation will influence millions around the world. Others, in the quest for free speech rights, hope for Trump's reinstatement on Twitter. If you have an opinion, where do you stand on this and other issues like energy policies, the war in Ukraine, . . . ?

For perspective, consider this political cartoon from the New York Times in 1915. Americans of German ancestry had lobbied hard to maintain neutrality in the war in Europe. There were practical considerations for that, but for some their German heritage took priority over their American citizenship. They were not alone. Many others acted on the basis of their heritage as well (e.g. Irish, Jews, Czechs, Poles). They saw themselves first as German or Czech and then as American.

We see a similar issue in Esther 1 where Xerxes cares only for himself and his image and fosters the same hedonistic narcissism in his nobles. His queen, Vashti, is little better. After seven days of self-gratification, their narcissism collides in a conflict before everyone. The display of wealth followed by the king's demand and queen's refusal suggest that for both of them self comes before spouse or kingdom, and the result is disastrous.

Jesus' followers have a similar temptation. 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to answer others with gentleness and respect, but as Os Guinness notes, "we all know Christians who are anything but gentle and respectful, people who are incurable smart alecks or have a mountain-sized ego that devours the oxygen in any room they enter. Little though they realize it, the more they open their mouths, the more they discredit their cause. It is difficult to be around people who always have to be right. When we behave like that, we betray our Lord. We not only contradict the "grace and truth" and the "grace upon grace" with which Jesus presented the gospel, but we present ourselves as a flat out contradiction of everything we ourselves are saying." Even if we are not confrontational about the societal issues discussed at the beginning, too often we are like Xerxes and Vashti or many during WWI and we think and act as Americans first and Christians second, if at all.



Discussion Questions

Were your opinions on the earlier issues primarily American or Christian? While we should be good citizens and value the country God has given us, how can we be sure to start with Jesus when forming our opinions?

How do keeping an image, winning an argument, or other self-serving desires often become our priorities?

How does humility not only help us relate well to God, but also help us present a good witness to those who don't know God? How do we develop and maintain that kind of humility?