

Stetsonville, Wisconsin, is a little village about forty miles from my home town of Prentice. I always enjoyed driving through this town as a kid because it reminded me of Dodge City on Gunsmoke. Stetsonville had hitching posts and horses pulling black buggies. I was fascinated by the folks dressed in black who drove those buggies along the highway. They were and are, known as the Amish. Even today I enjoy driving through Amish communities and seeing their well-kept farms with no pick-ups, tractors or electricity. In recent decades, movies like “The Witness,” the television show “Aaron’s Way” and all sorts of Amish Christian romance novels have given more exposure to this group. Yet, most people remain puzzled as to why the Amish don’t drive cars or use electricity. The reason is, the Amish are Christians, who believe that by avoiding “modern” technology they are obeying the command the Lord gave us in **1 John 2:15** *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

Folks, this is the second part of a two-part sermon on this text. Last week we talked about what this command means. We noted how though we might claim to love God, we often flirt with the world, as materialism, sexual lust, and pride seep into our lives. Today we explore how we as believers in and followers of Jesus must seek to live in the world, but not be a part of it. Let’s pause and pray God would use His word to speak in a fresh and clear way to each of us.

“In the world, but not of the world.” That should indeed be our goal as followers of Jesus Christ. Yet, what does this mean in practical terms? Today I want to focus on three dimensions of a Christian’s relationship to the world. Number one, God calls us to be different than the world. Christians should be different than not believers in Jesus. How should we be different? The Amish believe dressing in plain black clothes and not using modern technology are two ways to distinguish themselves from the world. I understand their view. We as Americans spend all sorts of money and energy on our clothes and a big part of why we do that is a desire to be “fashionable.” Some of you have spent a bit of time this morning just deciding what you were

going to wear. Would it not have been easier to just choose between your black outfit and your other black outfit? Some inner city public schools require students to wear uniforms, to avoid “fashion competition” that families cannot afford. I suppose we could do that at church, require uniforms so no one would be tempted to “dress to impress” others.

Modern technology, on the other hand, is something which I think has benefitted pretty much everyone, including Christians. However, I think the Amish correctly point to materialism as a trap. In 1962 my parents got our first television. It was black and white. In about 1975 they decided we needed a color television. Ten years after that, 1985, Nancy and I are married, and we bought a VCR. 1994 we got cable and two hundred channels. Ten years ago we decided we needed the big flat screen television. Now we have high-definition, DVR, Netflix, and On-Demand programming of any type one can imagine. Who knows what type of “television” we will have to have ten years from now. The Amish say, “Forget all that stuff. You don’t need it. Live the simple life.” Friends, maybe they are right. But, I have a couple of problems with how the Amish choose to be different from the world.

First, these differences can easily become non-biblical, legalistic, rules. No where in the Bible are we taught that we should always wear black or avoid using automobiles, electricity or TV. Thus, decisions to honor the Lord by avoiding those things, must be left to the individual and his or her consciences. **Second**, keep in mind that it is possible to live in a log cabin out in the woods—somewhere north of Greaney, not have any modern conveniences, be totally off the grid, and still be very worldly. Think about John’s definition of worldliness in **1 John 2:16** *For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.*

Folks, if I was Amish, I am sure I would still struggle with sinful cravings like greed and materialism. Someone can be just as much in love with a new horse and buggy as he can with a new car. If I was Amish I am sure I would still struggle with sexual lust and pride. The Amish make the same mistake many other Christians

have made. Men used to become monks, hide themselves away in a monastery, but they quickly learned that temptations and sin exist within that environment just like they do in any other. Some of us used to think that we were not worldly as long as we did not drink, smoke, chew or go with girls who do. Yet, there is much more to worldliness than that. It is not just how we dress or what we own. Worldliness is primarily about attitudes. And more than anything, worldliness means letting something else in life be a higher priority than Jesus Christ.

Friends, that is really how we need to be different from the world, different from those who are not believers. They are perfectly content going through life not thinking about Jesus, ignoring the claims He made and the commands He gave. We are to be different. We must not ignore the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We are to seek to honor Him with our minds, hearts, and lips in every aspect of our lives. So, how can we tell the difference between Christians and non-Christians? I don't think it is by how we dress, or what kind of car we drive, or what we eat or don't eat, what football team we cheer for, or what activity we do, or don't do. We can tell who the Christians are because they are the ones who love Jesus and seek to obey and honor Him each day. I remember twenty plus years ago, I said, I want Chisholm Baptist Church to be known, not as the church where people don't drink alcohol, but as the church where people love Jesus. And folks, by the grace of God, though I have not had a drop of alcohol in the past twenty years, I think more and more we are known as the church *where people really love Jesus*. Friends, when others see there is nothing or no one whom we love as much as we love Jesus, they will know we are different than the world.

Number two, it is not enough just to be different, God also calls us to be **dedicated** to the world. God calls us to love the people with whom we share this planet, especially the sister-in-law, next door neighbor, boss, or someone else with whom we are having a tough time getting along with. We are to dedicate ourselves to bringing the world the great news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is Paul's point in **2 Corinthians 5:19, 20** (NLT) *For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for*

Christ when we plead, "Be reconciled to God!" Friends, God so loved the world, loved the world so much, that He gave His only begotten, one and only Son, Jesus Christ. We are to love the world so much that we share with them the message of God's grace through Jesus.

Here, however, a tension arises. Sometimes we as Christians are so different from the world, so separate, that the world pays no attention to us. It has no interest in listening when we proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ. Some of you have had that happen. You try to tell a friend at school or work about what it means to be a genuine Christian, and they just don't want to hear it. Forty years ago, Paul Little, of InterVarsity, said, "The problem for the church is not that we have lost our message, but that we have lost our audience." Now, today some churches and Christians seem to have lost their message as well, but I am talking about those of us who remain faithful to the biblical gospel. Though we may not always communicate as clearly and wisely as we should, there is nothing wrong with our message.

Our problem is that we often preach to the choir, not the one that sits in these chairs many Sundays, but those who already agree with us and believe. When the glories of God's grace in Jesus are proclaimed in this room on Sunday mornings, there often are very few, if any, unbelievers in our midst. In the New Testament, evangelism, telling other people the great news about Jesus, involved Christians taking this message to the world, rather than waiting for the world to come to the church. This requires that Christians relate to the world, the people of the world, even as we strive to be different from them. We are to be in the world, but not of the world. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in **1 Corinthians 5:9, 10** (NLT) *When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that.*

Friends, the Bible gives instructions about church discipline which sometimes requires that we not associate with folks in the church who refuse to repent of immorality. Yet, here Paul tells us not to try to avoid contact with non-Christians, even if they do or say things we find repulsive. Jesus didn't avoid contact with sinners, whether they were drunks, prostitutes,

or arrogant religious people, they were all sinners with whom Jesus spent time. If we are going to obey the great commission and tell other people the great news about Jesus, we need to have relationships with folks who are not believers, with people who are, what we would probably call worldly.

Friend, let me ask you this question: Are most of your friends inside the church or outside the church? My guess is that for many folks here, the answer is: "Most of my friends are part of this church." Some of you don't have any close friends who are not believers in Jesus. Now, maybe you are thinking, "Pastor Dan, isn't it a good thing to have Christian friends?" Of course it is. I think our best friends should be fellow believers in Christ. Yet, if we are dedicated to loving the people of this world, we need to have non-Christian friends as well.

A few years ago, a study was done which found that on a typical Sunday about 16% of people in St. Louis County went to church. Not 60%, but 16%. That translates to about 32% of the population, less than a third, who attend church regularly, meaning at least twice a month. Interesting, in the Twin Cities metro area that number is higher, 45%. So, the question for us is this: How do we communicate with all those people around us who don't go to church, and let them know about God's grace in Jesus Christ? How do we get them to listen to us? We need to develop relationships with these folks. With all the different voices, out there, more and more people are unwilling to listen to anyone with whom they have not built some type of trust relationship. So, how do we do that? How do we befriend these folks? Well, we should not try to make friends with unbelievers by joining in immoral activities and sinning with them. Going out getting drunk or high with someone is not the way to get people to listen to us. Rather, we need to look for common ground. We need to identify interests which both Christians and non-Christians share.

Back in the first century, that is what the Apostle Paul did. As he says in 1 Corinthians 9:20, "To the Jew, he was like a Jew, to the Greek, He was like a Greek, so he could build relationships with people and tell them about Jesus Christ." At school and work we should not always be eating lunch with Christian friends. We should also eat with those who are not believers. Rather than always inviting friends from church

over for Friday night dessert, sometimes we need to invite neighbors who don't go to church to come to our homes. It is good to be involved in organizations and activities that include both Christian and non-Christians. We have to avoid being part of a holy huddle. A football team usually goes into a huddle, makes a plan, gets fired up, lines up and runs a play. Some Christians, however, seem to spend all their time encouraging each other. They even talk about how they need to do evangelism. But they never go out in the world and tell other people about Jesus. Friends, huddles are important in football, but no team will ever win a game if they spend all their time in the huddle. The church will never be a faithful witness of Jesus Christ if we spend all of our time with each other. Jesus tells us we are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). Folks, it is time, as Becky Pippert says in her book, "To Get Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World." That is how the Lord calls us to be devoted to the world.

When we are doing that, we are ready for the third step. God also calls us to be dangerous to the world. When the church and the world meet, the world should never be the same. That is what happened in the first century. According to Acts 17:6, the charge against Christians was "They have turned the world upside down," or the NLT says, "They have caused trouble all over the world," that charge was correct. When I say, we must be dedicated to the world, that we must befriend and love those who are not Christians, I don't mean we just need to be nice to them. It is not enough to sit down and have coffee or go to a movie with someone. We need to love people the way God loves them. I like the saying, "God loves us just the way we are, but He loves us too much to let us stay that way." When we see someone is going along in life, but ignoring God and refusing to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, we need to say, "Hey, I love you too much to let you keep living this way." We live in a world where Christ is not honored in our political, educational, or even many religious structures. That means we need to say, "Hey, this has got to change. I am too dedicated to the world to let it stay this way."

Friends, it is important for us to come out of the huddle. Instead of sitting on the sideline, we need to stand up, run the play, and challenge the world. We need to be asking, "How do you respond to the crucified and risen Lord,

Jesus Christ?” So, how do we do that? Well, there are as many different ways as there are people in this room. Each one of us needs to stand for Christ in the places and opportunities God has given us. Some of this work is to be done when we are alone in our bedroom as we pray for people around us who don’t know Jesus. That may be the most potent weapon we have to challenge the world. Some of us challenge the world inside our homes as we raise our children and train them to become people who love the Lord Jesus, who know what is right and know why it is important to do right. Some will challenge the world in the classroom, either as a teacher or a student, standing up for what is true, right and good. Some of us will challenge the world through our displays of honesty and compassion, refuting their claim that Christians are not really any different than anyone else. We need to challenge the world. When we do, we will encounter opposition because the world will find us dangerous. Why? Because when Jesus Christ is honored as Lord as He ought to be, the evil structures of this world begin to crumble.

Friends, each of us has an important choice to make. Will we relate to the world the way God desires? I remind you, if you choose not to do that you are on a dead-end road. The joy and meaning for which we all are looking can only be found when we choose to love God, instead of the world and everything in it. So, how can we relate to the world the way God desires? How do we make sure we are different from, dedicated to, and dangerous to the world? **First**, we need to make sure we are genuine Christians. It is important to remember that people who are religious, who have good morals and believe in God, can still be very worldly. That was true of the Pharisees in Jesus’ day. Though they were zealous in their effort to avoid what they considered worldly behavior, in reality they were, according to Jesus, children of the devil. To avoid what they considered worldly behavior, in reality they were, according to Jesus, children of the

devil. With their lips they professed to love God, but they did not love Him in their hearts. They loved themselves. They were proud and boasted about what they had, and what they had done. And they rejected Jesus as God’s Son and Savior. Friends, if you have never done that, I urge you to turn to the Lord Jesus today. If you are not sure you have done that, or not sure what that means, please make sure you talk to me later.

Second, as we noted last week, those of us who are believers in Jesus, who belong to the Lord, should not be flirting with the world. The Bible says we are to be separate from the world. Yes, that includes not doing certain things and avoiding various sinful activities. More important, however, it means developing attitudes and priorities which reflect a love for God, rather than a love for things of this world. Friends, we need to be honest with ourselves. I suspect every single Christian is tempted to be “worldly” in some part of life. We all struggle with being consistent in our loyalty to the Lord. We need to ask God to help us be truly different from the world.

Third, we cannot be content with just being different from the world. God expects more from us. We are called to be His ambassadors to a world that doesn’t know God or honor Him. We are called to bring the great news of Jesus to people whose lives have been ravaged by sin. Friends, I challenge you to identify one way God desires you to share His love, through words and actions, with this hurting world. Then, once you have identified what that is, do it. You might want to ask a friend to hold you accountable, but make sure it happens. No, we have no control over how others will respond, but it is up to us to say the words and do the things which reflect the love of Jesus Christ to others.

Friends, may the Lord help us be **different from, dedicated to, and dangerous to** this world. When we are, we will be truly “In this world, but not of this world.”