

Good Question! How do you live out your faith in today's world?

Oct. 20, 2019

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We start our GQ series with this one: How do you live out your faith in today's world? If I understand the spirit and heart behind this question correctly, I'm hearing the questionnaire noticing the challenges of following Christ; she's feeling the squeeze of the world and its many temptations. Compromising is an option, but not a faithful option. She doesn't want to give in like so many around. What does God's word say about these things?

The first thing I'd like to mention is that this is not a new problem. It's not like we have passed through some golden age where faith was normal and easy, but now because sinners are somehow more sinful and the powers of darkness are somehow darker living out your faith in today's world is somehow more difficult. God told us many, many years ago in Eccl. 1 (vs. 9-10), "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, 'See, this is new?' It has been already in the ages before us."

Of the things that matter, nothing is new. Sure, there's a lot of new things on the surface. Social media is relatively new; iphones are new (didn't have those in the 50's); hearing aides the size of a pencil eraser are new; car seats the heat your bottom in the winter and cool them in the summer are new. But all that is superficial. But the stuff that matters; the stuff that endures doesn't change. And so, get this: what you need to do to live out your faith in today's world is the same thing followers of Jesus needed to do 2000 years ago. You are being tempted to compromise faith just like the early church was tempted. You are being tempted towards greed, immorality, dishonesty, fear just like the early churches that were planted by the Apostle Paul. And this is really good news in this way: this word that was put together and given to the early church to help them live out their faith in their world will be just as helpful to us as we live out our faith in our world. This isn't some special time or special era where we need special grace and help to live out our faith; thinking that way feeds pride in us. Nope. We're just ordinary Christians trying to live out our faith in a rather ordinary time; thankfully, we have an extraordinary God to help us.

The passage that I think will help us comes from Eph. 4, so please turn there now. The first 3 chapters of Ephesians present to us glorious truth of God's mercy and grace. It's a beautiful bedrock of truth to believe and build your life on. Starting in chapter 4, Paul starts telling the church in Ephesus how to live; because of who God is and what he has done, live this way. That's why I'm bringing this chapter up considering our question: How do you live out your faith in today's world? That's exactly what Paul is trying to help these Christians do. So, let's read vs. 17-24 (READ).

We know that Paul is talking about how to live your in today's world by what he says in vs. 17. We just talked about this a couple of weeks ago; walking is a metaphor for living the

Christian life. Don't walk, don't live your Christian life like the Gentiles. In this context, *gentiles* is a reference to people who don't know God. Gentiles means nations, peoples. And here, clearly, Paul is referring to gentiles as people who are living a life contrary to the ways of Christ. So, the first thing we know about how to live our Christian life in today's world is that it's opposite to those who don't know God - big surprise! You'll spend your money differently than those who don't know God. Your use of time will be different. The things that come out of your mouth will be different than those who don't know God. You'll stay committed to relationships when those who don't know God won't. You'll be humble when those who don't know God will be proud. So, even as we just get started, can I ask you: do you see any differences between how you live your life to those who don't know God? That's a very convicting question for me, I have to say.

When you think of our question again (How do you live out your faith in today's world?) I want you to primary lean towards action and behavior. Walking, living our faith is about action; it's about what you do day by day. The text pretty much spells that out in vs. 19b-20. Don't walk (don't live like) people who don't know God. Well, how do they walk? Well, they're given to sensuality. Sensuality has to do with lustful actions and thoughts. The idea is of people totally captive to their sexual desire. Paul says they're greedy for every kind of impurity. Greedy, being, their obsessed with, hell-bent, on all kinds of impurity. They're committed and desirous of all kinds of impurity, when God is the definition of purity. That's action, friends.

This is a good rebuke against our tendency to think faith is largely in our heads. Write this down somewhere: Christianity is more than a belief; it is a *life*. The end game of our faith is not what we know, it's how we live our life today and forevermore.

Now, allow me to speak out of both sides of my mouth: this new life Jesus died to give us starts with changing what we believe and what we think is true. That's certainly not the end of it (I just said that), but it is the beginning. Do you see that starting in vs. 17? Where do gentiles go wrong? Look at the next phrase; vs. 17 and 18 says it goes wrong in their minds and hearts. People who don't know God get it wrong because of how they think. They don't believe in things that are true; instead, they believe things that are false. Paul expands on this in vs 18 - "They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart."

That's all about mind and heart. Ignorance. Darkened understanding. Futility of their mind. Because of this poor thinking they are cut off from the life of God. You can't know God or walk with God with that kind of mind that loves deceit and hates the truth. But where does that come from? Did you see the answer at the end of vs. 18? What does it say? *Due to their hardness of heart*. That's not so much what a person thinks. Do you know what that's about? It's about what a person *wants*. A hardness of heart is about our desires. It's about what we are committed to not because of what is true, but because of what we *want* to be true.

How in the world do we fix that? In me? In you? That's the miracle of the New Birth, friends. That gets fixed by the miracle of God's grace. When we encounter God through the

truthfulness of Jesus and his message, God changes our hearts. He makes us receptive to him. He makes us soft to his truth and eager for it. And when we experience God's mercy where he softens our hearts, making us ready and hopeful for truth, for right thinking, we can be changed.

Now, Paul gets into some strategy in our passage about how to live out our faith in today's world; what we just talked about is the foundation. We won't walk well in this world without having a heart soft and ready for the truth of God's word. And then, when our hearts are soft, we believe what God's word says is true. True about me, about him, about this world. About money, about relationships, about the importance of the church of God in my life. About sex. About politics. About everything! We need God's truth to inform our thoughts about everything and when that happens, we are ready to walk well.

But there's still things to do; there's still a strategy of action built upon this foundation of thinking well when God changes our hearts. And that's what Paul gets into in vs 20 and beyond (READ vs. 20-24). Let me summarize what we need to do to walk well - the strategy. You have to put something off and also you need to put something on. That's the basic strategy, but I need to fill it out a lot.

Let me summarize the first step of the strategy this way: we will walk well when, with new hearts and the mind of Christ, we put off (or look away from) the old way, the old man, the old self that belongs to the darkness of this present age (REPEAT). Do you see how I'm getting that from vs. 22? Paul is showing us what to do. Put off the old man, the old self; by which he means, *our attachment and identity with the old manner of life we used to walk in when we didn't know God*. Think of Adam after he sinned, bound to darkness, destined for death, prioritizing self-love rather than the love of God. That's the old man (or self).

Have you seen and perceived how you're still susceptible and tempted by your old life that's rooted in Adam's sin? Temptation doesn't magically go away when you're a Christian, does it? Paul is saying you've got to work at putting it away. In fact, you have to learn how to do this. Look at vs. 20-21, "But that is not the way you learned Christ! (meaning, when you learned about Christ, you heard and were taught that he came to save you from your sensuality and impurity - you were taught that Jesus died to save you from your own impure desires) -- assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off the old self."

Can I ask: were you taught this, my dear friends? Were you taught that Jesus has come to save you from yourself? Did you learn when you first heard the gospel that the freedom and the joy Jesus died to give you was a freedom from your old manner of living, which is corrupted by deceitful desires? If you were not taught this, I am sorry. If most of your learning about Christ has happened here at FBC and you don't know this yet, then I have failed you and I am sorry. Please, learn this now. Even when we are in Christ our old manner of life rears its ugly head and we're still lured by deceitful desires. That's why I often gasp when I hear Christians say something like, "Do what feels good because Christ has not given you pure desires." That's only

half true. With the Spirit of God living inside of us we do have new desires, but (here's what's often left out or ignored) the old deceitful desires are still at work. And to walk well in this world, you have to put this old man away. It takes work; it takes diligence. But it's a must to walk well.

But here's the second piece of the strategy: there's more, Paul says, that you've learned and were taught. Look at vs. 23-24, "and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self (man), created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." If Adam is the old man to whom you were connected to in sin, who's the new man you're supposed to put on? Christ! Christ is the new man that you put on.

But how do you do that? What does that mean? Here's what I'm going to do: I'm going to answer this the simplest way I can and then add a little more detail when and where needed to fill it out. The words righteousness and holiness are used a variety of ways in the Bible. The way I think it's being used here is in reference to good works. Put on Christ by doing the good works he did, the good works his word demands, the good works he called you to do. Put them on, FBC. Instead of sensuality (meaning, instead of doing lustful and impure things), be pure (meaning, guard your eyes; don't cross lines). Instead of doing greedy things (like, putting yourself first), be generous with what God has given you. Think about the things you say; you could give voice to every complaint, you could grumble about everything that's wrong, or, with the mind of Christ, you can use your words to encourage, to praise, to appreciate God and others - that's putting on the new man.

I hinted at this before: this is part of our training in Christ. This isn't automatic. We think far too many things in the Christian life are supposed to be automatic. It's not. It's trained, learned behavior. Titus 2:11-12 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." Training requires work; it requires practice, even. And the more we clothe ourselves with the character of Christ and actually do what Christ commands, the better we walk day by day in our faith.

At the risk of being simplistic, I think the keyword here is simply *obedience*. Living out your faith in today's world looks like obedience to Christ; it's putting on the good works of Jesus (his righteousness and holiness) that he modeled for us while he lived on this earth prior to his death and resurrection, and it's what he commands and strengthens in us today by the Holy Spirit. Just look at all that characterizes our world today. The ugliness in our politics. The sensuality and worldliness of our entertainment. There's greed from the richest to the poorest (you don't need to be rich to be greedy - some of the most generous people I know have lots of money. There are many people who have very little who are as greedy as they come).

You will stand out, you will make a difference, your faith will be a bold witness when your life is in obedience to Christ. It starts, of course, with having a new heart given to you by our gracious God. When you want the truth, you will accept and believe the truth when you're given it from God's word. After that happens, after you want and accept the truth about God, about his

son, about you, about his world, you're ready to start doing something. You have to put off the old man, the dark forces and deceitful desires associated with Adam and his sin. Day by day, as they pop up looking to deceive you, you have to go all whack-a-mole on them and beat them down. And while you're doing that, you also need to be putting on the new man. Clothe yourself with Christ's character, his good works. All of this is called obedience; when you're obedient to God because of your faith in him, you will walk well.