

## Christian Counterculture

### **I. The Sermon on the Mount is probably the best known part of Jesus' teachings, though arguably it is the least understood and the least obeyed.**

- A. It is the closest thing to a manifesto that Jesus ever uttered, because it is his own description of how his followers are to be and to live in this world. And that description can be summarized by a single word -- different. Jesus wants his followers to be different from the world. And those who follow the Sermon on the Mount will be different; they will be very different.
- B. Perhaps that theme is best expressed in 6:8, where Jesus says "Be not ye therefore like unto them." Do not be like them! And who are they? They include both the secular world and the religious world. We are not to be like the pagan world that turns it back on God, and we are not to be like the worldly religious establishment that also turns it back on God.
- C. There is not a single paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount in which this contrast between Christian and non-Christian standards is not drawn. It is the underlying and unifying theme of the entire sermon.
- D. The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the Bible of the Christian lifestyle. It presents a Christian value system and ethical standard that is totally at variance with those of the non-Christian world.
- E. If we obey Christ's commands in this sermon, then we will be different from the world. Our values will be different; our priorities will be different; our actions will be different; our attitudes will be different; our responses will be different; and our relationships will be different. Christ's message is that a Christian must never blend in with the world. The church must never be just another church on the block. We must be distinctive.
- F. No two words sum up the intention of the Sermon on Mount any better or more clearly indicate its challenge to the modern world than the expression "Christian counter-culture," and that is what we must be.

### **II. The word counterculture means "a lifestyle that is opposed to the dominant values and behavior of society." What are the dominant values in our own society? There are three: hedonism, materialism, and humanism -- and each represents a lifestyle that stands diametrically opposed to God.**

- A. Is this something unique about our own modern society? Hardly. The apostle

John listed the same three philosophies in 1 John 2:15-17.

1. **1 John 2:15-17** Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the **lust of the flesh** [hedonism], and the **lust of the eyes** [materialism], and the **pride of life** [humanism], is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

B. In that short passage, John describes all that is in the world. The lust of the flesh is in the world; the lust of the eyes is in the world; the pride of life is in the world. Hedonism, Materialism, and Humanism. Those were the dominant worldly philosophies in John's day, and they remain the dominant worldly philosophies in our day. Many things have changed dramatically in the last 2000 years, but human nature has not.

C. The apostle Paul described these same three philosophies in 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

1. **2 Timothy 3:1-5** But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be **lovers of themselves** [humanism], **lovers of money** [materialism], boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, **lovers of pleasure** [hedonism] rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

D. Those philosophies must not be our philosophies. We must not let them motivate us; we must not let them direct our steps; we must not pursue them.

E. Instead our philosophy must be that of Matthew 6:33 -- "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." That verse is the Christian counterculture in a nutshell. Those who follow that philosophy will never blend in with the philosophies of the world: hedonism, materialism, and humanism.

### III. **The church must treat these worldly philosophies very seriously.**

A. The first step to treating them seriously is to realize that we are at war against them. Israel is fighting Hezbollah. Our country is fighting Al Qaeda. The church is fighting hedonism, materialism, and humanism. We are at war, and we must treat our enemy very seriously.

1. **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 4 (For the **weapons of our warfare** are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

- B. The church of Christ is at war with these worldly philosophies that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. As C. S. Lewis correctly observed, "Christianity is a fighting religion." But we do not fight flesh and blood. Instead, we fight worldly philosophies.
- C. And these worldly philosophies are fighting back. They are aggressive and they are relentless. We must never underestimate their power or their influence. We must stand against them at every opportunity, and we must not permit them to infiltrate the church.
- D. History teaches us that we underestimate or ignore worldly philosophies at our peril. When Karl Marx was buried at London's Highgate Cemetery, only 11 people attended his graveside funeral. Most observers would have thought that was the end of the story, but of course it was not. His materialistic humanistic philosophy soon rose up from his writings and exalted itself against the knowledge of God and almost swept around the globe. We do not war after the flesh, but we are at war.
- E. The question is who will lead and who will follow. Will culture lead with the church following? Or will the church lead with the culture following. Many manmade churches have wholeheartedly adopted the former path, but that must never be true of the Lord's church. Our mission is to change the world without being changed by the world.
- F. We need to study these worldly philosophies because we need to know what we're up against. These philosophies are Satan's most effective weapons against the church, and we must not be ignorant of his devices. (2 Cor. 2:11).

#### **IV. While God says seek ye first His kingdom, the hedonist says seek ye first your own pleasure.**

- A. A hedonist is devoted to pleasure as the way of life. He is motivated and controlled by the pursuit and love of pleasure. He is guided and his steps are directed by the lust of the flesh. That is what he seeks first. His only goal is to live for the moment in a chaos of pure sensation.
- B. What does the Bible say about this philosophy?
  1. For a time, King Solomon followed this philosophy, and he described it well in Ecclesiastes 2:10 -- "Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure."
  2. Solomon's philosophy is the exact opposite of how a Christian must live. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24 "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Solomon denied himself nothing. He lived only to feed his own desires.

3. Paul described such a lifestyle in Titus 3:3.
    - a) **Titus 3:3** For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, **serving various lusts and pleasures**, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.
  4. James described the philosophy in James 4:1.
    - a) **James 4:1** Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your **desires for pleasure** that war in your members?
  5. Solomon described its wasteful consequences in Proverbs 21:17.
    - a) **Proverbs 21:17** He who loves pleasure will be a poor man.
- C. As we look around us today, I think we would all agree that this may be the dominant philosophy of our age. Why is it so widely followed? Why do so many people live for nothing more than their own pleasures?
1. Absent God, it is the most logical of all philosophies. That is what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:32.
    - a) **1 Corinthians 15:32** If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"
  2. Others follow pleasure because it is a spiritual sedative.
    - a) It deadens spiritual nerves, it muffles spiritual alarm systems, and it stifles spiritual growth. Those who live in pleasure eventually become completely deadened and unreachable.
    - b) It is telling that worldly pleasures are often called diversions or escapes. From what is the world trying to escape? The world is trying to escape emptiness and death because apart from Jesus Christ that is all the world has to offer.
    - c) Men seek pleasure as an antidote to meaninglessness. In short, they try to make pleasure take the place of God, and that is true of each of these philosophies. Within each man is a hole that only God can fill, and when God is rejected men will invariably seek to fill that gaping hole with something else.
    - d) Isaiah described those given to pleasures:
      - (1) **Isaiah 47:8-9** Therefore hear this now, you who are **given to pleasures**, Who dwell securely, Who say in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, Nor shall I know the loss of children'

But these two things shall come to you In a moment, in one day: The loss of children, and widowhood.

- e) They give themselves to pleasures to find permanence, security, and happiness -- but they find none of it. Those who pursue worldly pleasures will find at the end of that path what is at the end of every path that leads away from God -- death. Those who seek endless pleasure in this life alone will find nothing but endless disappointment, which is the dominant emotion of our age.
- f) People are looking for permanence, and true pleasure is permanent pleasure, but no earthly pleasure is permanent. Those who pursue earthly pleasures soon find pleasure in nothing because of their anxiety and certainty that their pleasures will not last. Those who search for permanent pleasures on this earth are doomed to disappointment.

D. Augustine said: "Man cannot live without joy. Therefore, when he is deprived of true spiritual joys it is necessary that he become addicted to carnal pleasures."

1. Yet the the pursuit of pleasure presents a paradox. The man who finds most pleasure for himself is the man who least hunts for it. Permanent pleasure awaits not those who deny themselves nothing, but those who deny themselves everything as they take up their cross and follow Jesus.
2. There is only one way to permanent pleasure, and the Psalmist tells us where to look:
  - a) **Psalm 16:11** You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

## V. **While God says seek ye first His kingdom, the materialist says seek ye first money.**

- A. A materialist is devoted to things as the way of life. He is motivated and controlled by the pursuit and love of money. He is guided and his steps are directed by the lust of the eyes. That is what he seeks first. He lives only to consume. His focus is on the new and the now. Whatever he has, he always wants more.
- B. If pleasure can't provide happiness and meaning, then certainly money must be answer. After all, whoever said money can't buy happiness just didn't know where to shop, right? Money must be the answer, because money is the answer to everything, right? Wrong.
  1. The first skeleton that archaeologists uncovered from the volcanic ruins of ancient Pompeii was grasping silver coins in its outstretched skeletal hands.

2. It has been said that most Americans today are frantically engaged in fighting for first class cabin space on the Titanic. They grasp and covet and obtain, and then sit at home feeling lost amidst their own abundance.

C. Let's consider what the Bible has to say about this worldly philosophy.

1. Paul described the great danger and damage of this philosophy.

a) **1 Timothy 6:9-10** But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

2. The prophet Haggai dealt with this philosophy.

a) **Haggai 1:5-6** Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! 6 "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes."

b) Do you think the Bible isn't relevant to our modern world? That verse from Haggai was written 2500 years ago, and yet no one today could write a more accurate description of our modern society. They earn wages to put into a bag with holes. They eat, but never have enough.

3. Once again, we find King Solomon as an example of someone who experimented with this philosophy.

a) **Ecclesiastes 2:4-7** I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. 5 I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. 6 I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. 7 I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

4. Does that description remind you of anyone else? Listen as Jesus describes the rich fool in Luke 12.

a) **Luke 12:16-19** Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat,

drink, and be merry." '

- b) The personal pronoun "I" occurs seven times in Solomon's description of himself and six times in the rich fool's description of himself. No one who is focused on possessions can be focused on God, and it shows not only in their values and priorities, but it shows in their speech.
5. And when is enough enough? Never. That is what Solomon ultimately discovered:
- a) **Ecclesiastes 5:10** He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase.
  - b) The materialist never has enough. They are permanently discontented.
6. If anyone in the world could ever have had enough or could ever have found lasting happiness from his possessions, it would have been King Solomon, but he did not. And no one ever has.
- a) John D. Rockefeller: "I have made many millions, but they have brought me no happiness."
  - b) John Jacob Astor: "I am the most miserable man on earth."
7. One of the most insidious characteristics of this philosophy is that it is a flattener.
- a) It flattens qualities into quantities. Money levels out our experiences by making everything conveniently comparable in terms of prices. Money places everything on the same level with the only difference being the price. Any quality that cannot be turned into a price is dismissed as unimportant. Those living under this philosophy have everything that money can buy -- and nothing that it cannot buy. They possess and put their trust only in things that can be seen.
  - b) 2 Corinthians 4:18 For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.
8. The Bible takes this philosophy very seriously, and if we want to be a Christian counterculture we must take it seriously as well.
- a) According to one estimate, there are more than 2000 verses in the Bible dealing with money and possessions. One in 10 verses in the gospels deals with that subject. Jesus spoke to this issue in 17 of his 37 parables.
  - b) The only incident in the Bible where Jesus was moved to violence involved money. In John 2:15 we read that Jesus himself made a whip of

chords that he then used to drive the money changers out of the temple.

- c) The fundamental axiom of materialism is that everything has a price and hence can be bought and sold. And even the Son of Man was bought and sold for 30 pieces of silver by one who had devoted himself to the love of money.
9. Acts 19 provides a wonderful example of how money should be valued in the Lord's church.
- a) **Acts 19:18-20** And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. 19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.
  - b) One silver coin was an average daily wage, so 50,000 pieces of silver was an enormous sum of money. Just think about all of the good that could have been accomplished with that much money. Think about all of the poor that could have been fed. Think about all of the missionaries who could have been funded. All the church would have needed to do is sell those magic books that represented demonic forces totally opposed to God and that were totally dedicated to the defeat of Jesus Christ.
  - c) Luke told us how much those books were worth for one reason. He wanted us to know that the price of those books did not enter at all into the church's decision to destroy them. Something infinitely more important was at stake.
    - (1) When I was at the University of Texas in the 80's, I briefly attended a local congregation who building is located right at the edge of the campus. One day they had a used book sale on their parking lot, and I wandered over between classes to take a look. I will never forget seeing one table piled high with Jehovah's Witnesses literature priced for sale. I immediately thought of this passage from Acts 19.
  - d) The message in Acts 19 is that there is not enough silver in the world to outweigh the evil represented by those books. The early church did not look to money for its motivation, but if you read a little further in Acts 19 you will find someone who did.
  - e) **Acts 19:24-27** For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, **brought no small profit** to the craftsmen. 25 He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our **prosperity** by this trade. 26 "Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. 27 "So not only



is **this trade of ours in danger** of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

- f) Demetrius mentions his business three times before he finally gets around to mentioning his religion. His concern for the temple of Diana was merely a pretence. His real concern was the damage that was being done to his business and his profits by the proclamation of the gospel.

(1) If a congregation tolerates error because of concern for the contribution plate, which of these examples is it following? Aren't they following the example of Demetrius?

- g) The contrast in Acts 19 is stark, and the contrast in our lives must be just as stark if we are to be a Christian counterculture. We must not be motivated and guided by money.

10. Man looks to money for permanence and security, but it offers neither. I have never seen a hearse followed by a U-Haul trailer.

- a) In Luke 12:15, Jesus said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

(1) Now there is a counter-culture verse! For most of the world, one's life consists precisely in the abundance of the things he possesses.

- b) Mark 4:18-19 Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 19 "and the cares of this world, the **deceitfulness of riches**, and the **desires for other things** entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

- c) And in Hebrews 13:5 we read, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

- d) Luke 16:13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

(1) That is the choice. You can serve money or you can serve God, but you cannot serve both. And if you are devoted to your money, you will despise God. The world has made its choice. As the church of Christ, our choice is clear.

**VI. While God says seek ye first His kingdom, the humanist says seek ye first yourself.**

- A.** A humanist is devoted to himself in particular and mankind in general as the way of life. He is motivated and controlled by the pursuit and love of human pride and human achievements and human wisdom. He is guided and his steps are directed by the pride of life. That is what he seeks first. His religion is a religion of self glorification. His commitment is to human potential and human development through human effort.
- B.** God is not considered because God is not needed. The humanist does not need God to explain how we got here. The humanist does not need God to explain how we should live. The humanist does not need God to explain where we are going. The humanist is completely committed to the pride of life.
- C.** Pride. Aristotle called it one of the greatest virtues. Christianity calls it the greatest vice. Nothing distinguishes Christian morality from pagan morality more sharply than their opposite attitudes toward human pride.
1. Pride has separated men from God from the very beginning. It creates a desire to be God; it creates a desire to be over the Law rather than under the Law. It stands behind all other sins because every sin says to God, "my will be done." If Hell has a theme song, it is the song "I did it my way."
  2. Pride is the first and greatest sin because it violates the first and greatest commandment: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Pride loves the self with all its heart, with all its soul, and with all its mind.
  3. If the hedonist has a lust for pleasure and the materialist has a lust for money, the humanist has a lust for power. His pride of life creates a false confidence in the goodness, the power, and the accomplishments of mankind.
  4. According to this philosophy, there is no problem that mankind cannot solve, if not today then someday.
    - a) Mankind can conquer disease and someday maybe even death through genetic tampering. Mankind can end war and poverty. Mankind can understand the mysteries of time and space. Nothing is beyond our ability. That is the philosophy of humanism, the pride of life.
  5. And woe to those who stand in its way. History is littered with the bodies of those who stood in the way of the power of man. To this group, Christianity is a weakness that hinders the progress and achievements of mankind.
- D.** We began this lesson by talking about the Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps no one has ever *hated* the Sermon on the Mount more than Friedrich Nietzsche.
1. Although the son and grandson of Lutheran preachers, he rejected

Christianity while still a young man. He wrote a book entitled "The anti-Christ" in 1888, the year before he went mad. In that book he defined 'good' as "all that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man," and he defined as 'bad' "all that proceeds from weakness." He despised Christianity, and he wrote that the only person in the entire New Testament that he felt obliged to respect was Pontius Pilate. In the very last words in his book, he called for a "revaluation of all values." Fifty years later, a man named Adolph Hitler took him up on that suggestion. It was Nietzsche who wrote that God was dead, and it was Hitler who passed that very book out to each member of his Nazi army.

2. If the hedonist says to God, "I can escape from you," and if the materialist says to God, "I can replace you," then the humanist says to God, "I do not need you."

**E. What does the Bible say about this philosophy?**

1. Proverbs 8:13 tells us that God hates pride.
2. James 4:6 "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."
3. Psalm 10:3-4 For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; He blesses the greedy and renounces the LORD. 4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.
  - a) Again, we have an ancient description of our modern world. Could anyone think of a more accurate description of our modern culture than what is found in Psalm 10?
4. Proverbs 16:5 Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Though they join forces, none will go unpunished.
5. Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; 24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD.
6. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

**F. There is one problem that mankind will never be able to solve on its own.**

1. Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

G. There are three dominant worldly philosophies, and we have now looked at each of them. The church is at war with these philosophies, and thus we must live counter to them. Our culture must be a counterculture.

**VII. No comment should be more hurtful to a Christian than the words "But you are no different from anybody else." If we ever hear that said of us then we have gone terribly wrong. No one who follows the Sermon on the Mount will ever hear that. But if we are devoted to the lust of the flesh, to the lust of the eyes, or to the pride of life, then we are no different from anybody else.**

A. A worldly church cannot and will not reach the world. The church must be distinct from the world to reach the world.

B. Matthew 5:14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

C. We cannot be like the world and at the same time be a light to the world.

D. If we are to help those who are slaves to pleasure and money, we cannot ourselves be their slaves.

E. We cannot reach those driven by pleasure if we are driven by pleasure. We cannot reach those who serve money, if we serve money. We cannot reach those who trust in the power of man if we trust in the power of man.

F. We must be different. We must be a Christian counterculture. Only then can we be that shining city set on a hill.

**VIII. Every person alive today is in pursuit of something, and we are motivated, guided, and controlled by what we pursue. What must a Christian pursue?**

A. Romans 14:19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

B. 1 Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love.

C. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

D. 2 Timothy 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love,

peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

- E. Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.
- F. 1 Peter 3:11 Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.
- G. 1 Timothy 6:11-12 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith.
  - 1. And in those verses, Paul reminds us that we are at war. We are fighting the good fight of faith. Christianity is a fighting religion.

**IX. God's command to us is the same command he has always made of his chosen people: "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate!"**

- A. 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." 17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."
- B. We must come out from among them. We must be different. We must be a Christian counterculture.
- C. But you can't fight the good fight of faith if you are not in the Lord's army. And the only way to enlist is to obey the gospel and be added to the Lord's church.
- D. And no one is on the sideline in this battle. No one can be neutral. There are only two destinations: Heaven or Hell. No one is going to die and go to Switzerland!
- E. To be added to the Lord's army you must be added to his church, and that occurs by obedience to the gospel. You must believe, you must repent, you must confess that Jesus is the Son of God, you must be baptized for the remission of your sins, and then and only then are you added to his church. Finally, you must be a faithful soldier of Christ unto death.