

The Fashion of Christ

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We live in a world that has a distinct fashion--a fashion defined in part by hate and unrelenting violence.

Personally, I am surprised that others are surprised with what is taking place in the war on terror and in Iraq. We live in a world that is intoxicated by the pursuit of power. We think nothing of destroying life, figuratively and literally, to obtain our portion of control and dominance.

As a family living for six months in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1993, we daily read in the Johannesburg Star of the black-on-black violence that had raged since 1990 throughout the nation. The ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party, in a country of some 40 million people, regularly unleashed revulsion, each toward the other, in that three-year period.

"Thousands more South Africans have died violently since 1990 than were sacrificed by the United States in nearly 10 years of war in Vietnam's killing fields, ... in less than three-and-a-half years in South Africa 52,800 people have died violently" ... --1993 August edition of the Johannesburg Star.

These figures pale in comparison to what we are told of the number of lives lost just a couple of years later in

Bosnia. Depending upon the source, it has been reported that well over 110,000 (perhaps as many as 150,000) Muslims, Croats and Serbs perished in the pursuit of control and supremacy.

Then in 1994, the world was horrified by the Rwandan Genocide. In a hundred-day period at least 500,000 ethnic Tutsis and thousands of moderate Hutus were executed in Rwanda. Some put the death figures at over 800,000.

If one did not know better, one might think that there had been in this brief period of time a world-class competition in violent deaths. Yet, it is well-known that in the same century the figures just mentioned pale significantly in comparison to the 125 million who perished at the hands of world leaders famished for power and domination.

Sadly, what is taking place in Iraq should be expected! This is the "fashion of the world." The end of it all is not in sight. You can horrify me, but not surprise me, when it comes to the degree of evil that is unleashed in the world today. What reason do we have to think that tomorrow will be any different?

There is a difference between the fashion of the world and the fashion of Christ. Christ's fashion is defined clearly in the gospels, which have been with us for some 2,000 years. It is radically different than which is so popular today.

Consider the words of Christ as recorded for us in Matthew 5:

'Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 Blessed are those who mourn,

for they will be comforted.
 5Blessed are the meek,
 for they will inherit the earth.
 6Blessed are those who hunger and
 thirst for righteousness,
 for they will be filled.
 7Blessed are the merciful,
 for they will be shown mercy.
 8Blessed are the pure in heart,
 for they will see God.
 9Blessed are the peacemakers,
 for they will be called sons of God.
 10Blessed are those who are persecuted
 because of righteousness,
 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11"Blessed are you when people insult
 you, persecute you and falsely say all
 kinds of evil against you because of me.
 12Rejoice and be glad, because great is
 your reward in heaven, for in the same
 way they persecuted the prophets who
 were before you.

Salt and Light

13"You are the salt of the earth. But if
 the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be
 made salty again? It is no longer good
 for anything, except to be thrown out
 and trampled by men.

14"You are the light of the world. A
 city on a hill cannot be hidden.
 15Neither do people light a lamp and put
 it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its
 stand, and it gives light to everyone in
 the house. 16In the same way, let your
 light shine before men, that they may see
 your good deeds and praise your Father
 in heaven.'

---Matthew 5:1-16

The fashion of the world
 promotes self and the destruction of

others. Even the things of our world that
 seem to be healthy, such as progress,
 often show themselves to be dangerously
 self-serving and evil. Be encouraged: it
 is not as bad as it could be!

The fashion of Christ is radically
 different than the fashion the world
 prescribes. Christ in these few verses
 speaks of the two sides of His designer
 fashion.

Christ's fashion demands character.

One might translate the New
 Testament Greek word *markarios*, at the
 beginning of most of these verses, as
 "happy", or "fortunate," instead of
 "blessed." The beatitudes are Christ's
 prescription for true happiness. The first
 twelve verses describe not so much what
 Christ expects of His people, but what
 you will find as fundamental to who they
 are. The characteristics provided in this
 section of Matthew will be found in the
 life of one who has a true relationship
 with Christ. In some sense, there is a
 progression in the list. You will not
 have one without the other. Because
 they are in opposition to the fashion of
 the world, they create a degree of
 conflict. If true happiness is desired,
 then the following will be present:

POOR IN SPIRIT Poverty
 describes much of the world. All people
 may not be starving to death; but,
 multitudes live in crude housing and
 often go without food. No one desires
 poverty. Even if it describes us, we may
 deny it. The same is true when speaking
 spiritually. We tend to think of ourselves
 more highly than is warranted. The
 result is arrogance and pride and a
 judgmental attitude. The person who
 sees rightly his or her standing before

God knows that he or she has fallen way short of His acceptance. As the apostle Paul says in Romans 3, “They have fallen short of glory of God.” They have nothing to offer Him. Admitting one’s spiritual poverty will cause one to see the need of His grace and mercy. We are helpless and without hope. This part of Christ’s fashion is needed today. Without it we have no reason to think that we belong to Him.

MOURN Proper grief is not because one experiences physical pain, loss of a loved one, nor a wounded pride. It is the woeful state of one who knows his poverty of spirit. King David understood and experienced such mourning when confronted with his sin by the prophet Nathan after committing adultery and murder. Those who adopt the fashion of Christ will experience a degree of discomfort. It is a blessing to be characterized as one who laments over his own sin.

MEEK Those who are poor in spirit and, thus, brokenhearted, treat others with humility. There is an absence of grudging, resentment, and bitterness. There is no self-righteousness in the presence of others. The apostle Paul, speaking of Christ in Philippians 2, says:

“ 5Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6Who, being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped,
7but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8And being found in appearance as a
man, he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—

even death on a cross!”

-- Philippians 2:5-8

If this is Christ’s presentation of Himself to the world, should ours be any different?

HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS What does it mean for a person to long for righteousness? Righteousness belongs to the one who has conformed perfectly to the law and will of God. A person may not have knowledge of the specifics of God’s law; however, even the non-believer will have God’s standard written on his heart and will be held to that standard. (*“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, 15since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.”-- Romans 2:14-15*) We long to perform that well. But most know and admit that life has left them guilty and defeated.

The person whose fashion is like Christ’s knows well that he lacks righteousness and seeks after the righteousness of Christ. His focus is on Christ’s life and work alone. This is not a partnership--Christ plus my good works as a means of achieving righteousness--but Christ alone!

MERCIFUL We demand justice from offenders and expect mercy when guilty of being offensive. Those who have received the mercy of God, who desire and recognize His grace, will show mercy to others. They will have a gracious spirit. This is not mercy shown to those who have treated us with kindness and generosity. Christ says, “

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?” –Matt.5:46
 No, those who are merciful are those who have been offended and treat the offender with the benevolence that comes from the Spirit of Grace.

PURE IN HEART This is singleness of heart, honesty with no hidden or selfish motive. The sixth Beatitude describes those who desire righteousness and have obtained it through Christ. Their focus is to please and worship God in spirit and in truth. They understand what it means to depend upon Him to obtain and maintain the heart’s immutable focus.

PEACEMAKERS As mentioned early, we live in a world characterized by conflict. On the micro-level we see the need to maintain harmony within our personal relationships. The family today is in great need of reconciliation and peace. The same is true globally. There is always a great deal of world tension. Those in the diplomatic community have an endless job as peacemakers. Lives transformed by Christ have been granted the greatest peace that man could desire. The Christian understands the call to actively engage in a world of turmoil for the sake of making peace.

THE PERSECUTED It sounds odd that Christ would say there is blessing in being treated poorly. Who would want persecution? This is not persecution for social, political or economical reasons, but because of righteousness—Christ’s righteousness. Those who engage with the world for the sake of Christ will experience the wrath of the world. This may take place in the

home, in community or in the place of work. The apostles learned first-hand what Christ meant, as we read in the book of Acts. The followers of Christ accepted the hardships as a badge of honor. They could see the blessing. The writer of Hebrews says it well:

“You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.” –Hebrews 10:34

The list of blessings presents real challenges for us. Does it describe our lives? Does it represent what needs to be accomplished? Perhaps the blessing is that the list reminds us of our need for the Savior. The world is different when such character is openly displayed.

The fashion of Christ transcends the individual’s character. His fashion will impact the world.

Christ Fashion is meant to impact the world.

The people of God are for the people of the world. We can not afford to be passive. The people of God will make a difference in the world as they live out their Christ-dominated lives. This influence needs to be more than occasional. It will take place in every sphere of life: home, school, work, community, nation and world.

The Christian’s influence within the world will manifest itself in two distinct ways.

Combats deterioration

I am continually amazed at the constant rate of deterioration that takes place within my life and possessions. Anyone who owns a home or car knows the reality of the repair bill(s). At times it comes in huge waves. The car is in the shop; the dishwasher leaks; and, the most recent termite inspection of one's house proves positive. The list of things needing attention goes on and on, year after year. If the world only experienced deterioration in terms of things, that would be great. The reality is, however, that we live in a world that morally and spiritually deteriorates.

Christ in verse 13 informs His listeners that they are the salt of the earth. Although salt today is used primarily for flavor, that is not the emphasis intended in Matthew's gospel. Salt was used as a preservative. Our world is in constant decay. This is true not only physically, but morally and spiritually. This is the reality of our world. The Scriptures bear this fact out over and over again. The decay is not only in the world, but within the church. The Christian denominations in the United States once stood for the fundamentals of historic Christianity. Today many of them do not. The present position of many churches is that Scriptures are irrelevant, and immorality is acceptable. This is clearly a picture of salt losing its saltiness. The conscience is fading. The apostle Paul spoke of this in his address to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20.

The state of the church is reflected in the world. A healthy believer who represents the fashion of Christ will **accept** and **live** for truth. By doing so he will retard the decay most often seen in the world.

Dispels Darkness

Second, the influence of the Christian will be positive. Light is needed to guide and direct. It removes fear and brings comfort. Christ is the light of the world in the supreme sense. The Old Testament prophet spoke about Christ when he said,

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned." -- Is .9:2

The gospel of John spoke of the same:

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."--John 1:4-5

The world is described as dark. It is evil, lonely, hateful and despairing. A recap of the news is all we need to remind us of this certainty. The world needs the light. Christ, who is the light, declares us to be the light of the world. This does not mean that we are perfect. It does mean that we have His righteousness, His truth, goodness, joy, peace and happiness.

As recipients of the light, we have the privilege of transmitting it to our world. The fashion of Christ is more than an ideology or educational system. In fact, it is more than a message. The fashion of Christ is centered upon the person of Christ. He is the one who, through His Spirit and Word, works in our lives and the lives of those within the world. He goes before us and is with us.

One man that understood the fashion of Christ was Arthur S. DeMoss. In 1979, at age 54, he died. He was the founder, president, and chairman of the board of the National Liberty Corporation, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. He owned, over the course of his life, five life insurance companies and affiliated marketing service organizations. In just twenty years, DeMoss saw the firm he established grow into one of the nation's most successful insurance marketing organizations. He was a pioneer in the mass marketing of life and health insurance, and his innovative methods earned for him a place of prominence in the history of insurance marketing in this country. Yet he was also well-recognized as an outspoken Christian. Because of the management structure he had developed, he was able to spend much of his time as a featured speaker at various Christian functions throughout the United States and abroad. He was a businessman who put Christ first in his life.

This also meant that he put Christ first in his home. In the busyness of his work, responsibilities, travel and speaking engagements, he invested much time in the spiritual development of his family. He knew that this task required even more planning and diligence than building a financial empire. His wife of 22 years remarked after her husband's death that she believed she was one of the most blessed women in the world. Each of their seven children (9-21 at the time of DeMoss' death) had a personal relationship with Christ. One of the older children explained why she shared her father's commitment to God and His work: "Our earliest memories are of Dad spending the first part of every day on his knees

and reading the Word. Conversation about spiritual things was not reserved for Sundays, but every part of life was related to God's principles. We regularly saw the power of the gospel of Christ change lives as people were almost daily saved in our home. Dad often related at dinner an account of a business acquaintance who had received Christ in the office that day. Then we shared in the joy of seeing God transform that man's life and that of his family. As we have grown up and begun to leave home, Dad's letters and phone calls have reminded us almost daily that no joy in life can begin to match that of being wholly committed to God."

DeMoss was an example of the fashion of Christ.

-Reflections-

1. How do you view your life and world in the context of this passage? Is it fundamentally good, perhaps just a bit misguided at times? Or, is it fundamentally evil?
2. What part of Christ's teaching in this passage stands out the most for you? What part do you find most challenging?
3. Are there people in your life who believe and live out the beatitudes?
4. How do you demonstrate the fashion of Christ in:
 - a. Family?
 - b. Work?
 - c. Church?
 - d. Community?
 - e. The nation's Capitol?
5. How does the gospel relate to all this for you, personally?