

CHRISTIAN DISTINCTIVENESS

A POSITION PAPER ON PERSONAL STANDARDS

*“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.”*
I John 2:15

THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE

Citizens of God’s kingdom bear its distinctive marks. God admonished Israel: “ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and **an holy nation**” (Exodus 19:6). This identity is not restricted to Israel alone, but is impressed upon all of God’s people: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, **an holy nation**, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (I Peter 2:9). The purpose for the Christian’s existence is to demonstrate the praise of God by a life that is clearly distinguishable from the world.

OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENT

God chose Abraham and changed him. From that day forward Abraham’s descendants were commanded by God to be distinctive. There are many examples of that distinctiveness.

They were forbidden to intermarry with other nations, for to do so would diminish their identity, making them like the heathen. God gave them a dietary code which set them apart from other nations. The way men trimmed their beards, the manner in which they planted their fields, their treatment of illness, of animals; these and many other matters were regulated by divine law to maintain their uniqueness for God’s glory.

These distinguishing marks set them apart from other nations, indicating the one quality unique to God’s people: holiness. The Old Testament is the history of one nation whose existence was to be a testimony to the holiness of God. God is holy, separate from anything that defiles, and unique among all beings. His people are called upon to demonstrate this by their distinctive, holy living.

THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN

People brought to Christ in the New Testament were also changed. When Christ delivered the “maniac of Gadara” of his demons, he became a new man (Mark 5). Zacchaeus (Luke 19) not only abandoned deceitfulness and greed, but made reparations

and became a philanthropist. Matthew left his lucrative, greed-driven profession and followed the Savior (Matthew 9:9). Saul, a chief persecutor of Christians, became the Apostle Paul and clearly stated his willingness to abstain from anything which threatened to hinder the progress of Christ's kingdom (I Corinthians 8:13).

These lives were not changed by a list of rules imposed upon them. Rather, their love for Christ who delivered them ruled their lives. Paul wrote: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (II Corinthians 5:14-15). Love for Christ motivates believers to live for Him, rather than for self.

CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

Godly living is not a matter of duty or rule-keeping. It is an expression of love for Christ and of gratitude toward God. God's people, perceiving their deliverance by Christ from sin, damnation, and religious law, thereafter live "unto him which died for them." Christians' lives are characterized by a loving gratitude which distinguishes them from nonbelievers.

They heed Christ's words, "but seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). They "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," for to love this present world is a sure sign that "the love of the Father is not in [them]" (I John 2:15)."

They know God's love for them; not a love simply mentioned in ancient scriptures, but love "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5). As courtship love determines the action in the relationship, *even more* the infused love of God governs the lives of the redeemed. Christians become conscious of the potential to offend God, and thus jealously guard their actions to avoid grieving Him.

Believers **experience a growing love for Christ**. Beholding Him, "the things of earth grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." Their love for "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," subsides (I John 2:16). A growing love for Christ progressively separates the individual from that which is unbecoming of the Savior's honor and holiness.

Their love for Christ becomes more evident in their **desire to develop Christlikeness**. We tend to copy the traits of people we admire. And those who love Christ see Him as the one they most want to be like. Conversely, they do not want to sound, appear or think like those who are careless about Christ.

They see holiness as a worthy objective, and although they never feel they have attained it in practice, they are in continual pursuit of it. They "press toward the mark for the prize

of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). They desire to abstain from unholy things.

Christians know they are citizens of God’s kingdom, and that their earthly existence is, by contrast, brief and insignificant. “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). They don’t get excited by passing fads, are not confused by the values of this world and are not impressed by the fashions of man. They “set [their] affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2). They seek praise from heaven’s King rather than the acclaim of earth’s people.

Their bodies are the residence of God’s Holy Spirit. “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (I Corinthians 6:19-20). Therefore, they are concerned not to defile their bodies or to expose, attire or decorate them as if they were the possession of anyone but God Almighty.

They are conscious that their lives on earth are spiritual warfare. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). Thus, they are concerned that it is clear whose side they are on. They don’t want to be confused with citizens of this world.

Mindful of God’s rich mercies to them, **they literally present themselves to God.** “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:1-2). Heeding this exhortation, they do not let the world pour them into its mold.

For these reasons they are unimpressed by things which thrill the wicked. Worldly fads and fashions which arise from lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (I John 2:15) do not interest them. That which will attract attention to self is bypassed for the sake of representing Christ to a needy world. They keep themselves apart - holy - from worldly influences. And they do so thinking it is reasonable, no matter what the world thinks or says about them.

Christ admonished His disciples, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matthew 5:13). Salt flavors foods: it is not flavored *by* them. Its presence purifies and delays corruption. The believer’s distinctiveness from the world identifies him as Christ’s, and as such he bears testimony

to the holiness of God. He is not of the world's flavor; rather, he seasons his surroundings in a manner distinctively Christian. He is distinctive.

SUMMARY

Harford Christian School endeavors to instill the values of Christian distinctiveness in its students. Thus, the guidelines for dress, appearance and conduct reflect those same values. Children cannot be expected to exhibit them naturally, yet standards consistent with these principles must be maintained for a testimony and for instruction. The resultant Christian atmosphere will then be maintained, and the distinctive characteristic of God's people will be evident.

Not everyone will understand and embrace these values and standards. This is an undisciplined age where distinctiveness is shunned and Christians separated from worldliness are rare. Moreover, we fear the modern church has ceased to be the "salt of the earth." Overcome by worldliness, it has become a part of the world rather than a distinctive body within the world.

This argues more forcefully the need for standards. They are needed to present an exalted view of Christ, and as an illustration of the holiness that is unique to God.

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. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. I John 2:15-17