

Settle Down

Growing Up in Babylon

May 9, 2021

Today we're looking to strike a balance in *this* world between *relating to* it and *separating from* it.

Is it bad to drink in front of unbelievers? As opposed to *hiding* it at *home* like a *good* Christian!



We saw last Sunday that *we* are *conformers*, so we must consciously *un-conform* from sinful influences with a *complete* mind *metamorphosis*, by daily *resetting* our autopilot *heading*, regaining our *bearings* by our Guiding Light; and then battling our acclimating to the stink of sin by routinely stepping away for a spiritual *breather* with our *Father*, so we can effectively reflect His *good* and *pleasing* and *perfect* will, that we're testing and confirming *and* proclaiming, by slowly but steadily *turning toward* the way of the *Lord*, and *away from* the ways of a world that's so often *opposed* to those who've found the truth and the life and the *mercy* that *this* turbulent world is so deeply longing *for*.

Romans 1-11 is a comprehensive depiction of God's *mercy* through the *work* of the *Rock* to whom our *faith* is *anchored*. Therefore Paul begins chapter 12:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in *view* of God's *mercy*, to offer your bodies as *living* sacrifices, holy and *pleasing* to God—*this* is your spiritual act of *worship*. **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world**, but be transformed by the *renewing* of your mind. – Romans 12:1-2 NIV

But **if we take this command (to un-conform from *this* world) too far, we'll run in one of several aimless directions** (as Paul calls them) – like *retreating* into the *church* for *fear* of coming into *contact* with the *filth* of *this* world. **A fear that *Jesus* never felt**. Not when He defended an adulteress caught in the act, (Jn 8:1-11) or when He chose a *devil* as a disciple, (Jn 6:70) or when the respected *religious* elite badmouthed *Him* for *drinking* with *riffraff*. (Mt 11:19)

I've heard several variations on a question concerning this issue, like: **"Is it okay if I drink a beer at my company picnic?"** The conflict being: **"How will they know I'm different from them?"** But is *that* the goal? To *show* 'em we're not *like* 'em? The apostle Paul tells the Corinthians:

To those *under* the law I became *like* one *under* the law ... so as to *win* those *under* the law. To those *not* having the law I became *like* one *not* having the law (though I ... *am* under *Christ's* law), so as to *win* those *not* having the law. To the *weak* [Paul's nickname for *vegetarians* (Rom 14:2)] I became *weak*, to *win* the weak. I have become *all* things to *all* men so that by *all* possible means I might save *some*. I do *all* this for the sake of the *Gospel*, that I may *share* in its *blessings*. [By blessing *others* by sharing its *Good News* of God's *mercy*] – 1 Corinthians 9:20-23 NIV



My 2nd favorite missionary, Bill Kieselhorst, spoke here years ago, and told about fishing with some *pastors*, but the fish weren't biting. And some guys pulled alongside griping, with "g-d this" and "f-bomb that", and offered 'em a *beer*. One of the *pastors* in Bill's boat said, "No thanks. We're *pastors*." At which point Bill stepped *into* the *other* boat and said, "But *I'm* a *missionary*, so I'll have your beer."

Paul *also* explains to the Corinthians, how to *be* all things to *all* without *conforming* to *any*.

[Believers] who *use* the *things* of the world, [should live] as if not *engrossed* in them. For *this world* in its present *form* is passing away. [So *un-conform*] – 1 Corinthians 7:31 NIV

Employ and enjoy the things of this world, but don't become absorbed. Earlier in this same letter to the Corinthians, Paul had to correct what they had *misunderstood* about *avoiding* the depraved, and the debauched, and the dishonest, and the demon-worshipping cult members.

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at *all* meaning the people of *this world* who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to *leave* this world. – 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 NIV

It's all about being *in* without being *of*. It's odd but **we're called to simultaneously participate and separate.** And that takes wisdom and training because these two crucial Biblical impulses, to relate *and* retreat, will always be in tension in the life of a true believer. **If we absorb this world's ways we have no light.** But **if we quarantine from it we hide our light.** Jesus said:

"My prayer is *not* that You take them *out* of the world but that You *protect* them from the evil one. They are *not of* the world, even *as I* am *not of* it." – John 17:15-16 NIV



Want to know the best Biblical parallel for *us* – with the *coolest* archaeological discovery: God's faithful who were exiled in Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar, (597^{BC}) 666 years before the cross, (30^{AD}) who found themselves surrounded by a polytheistic society embracing a variety of competing gods and beliefs and values. Now in Jesus' day the Roman empire was the same way, so Peter signs off his first letter from:

Your sister church *in Babylon* – 1 Peter 5:13 NRS

And in Revelation, Babylon becomes the symbol of a rebellious world. (Rev 17:5) And those exiled in Babylon (2,600 years ago), serve as a great parallel for believers in this world today.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon ... carried into captivity all Jerusalem: all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, [like Daniel and his friends: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego] ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths. – 2 Kings 24:14 NKJ

And they sought God's will regarding the same balance that we're seeking to strike.



This is Nebuchadnezzar's *northern* palace. And you *gotta* wonder if this is the one where Daniel interpreted the king's dreams! Much of the original city remains, and for years it's been slowly reconstructed. But *nothing* compares to Babylon's processional way that's been reassembled brick by brick in a museum in Berlin. That's the *original* colored *glaze!* The Processional Way was over a half mile long; and Daniel and his friends were led past these walls and through this gateway into their new home.



FYI: Remember when Nebuchadnezzar "was walking on the roof of the royal palace" and said "Is not this the great Babylon I have built ... for the glory of *my* majesty?" And God struck him with temporary insanity and he grazed grass like an ox? (Dan 4:29-33) *This* is what he was talking about!



Our situation is similar: surrounded by a smorgasbord of spiritual paths in a sea of people opposed to our deepest convictions regarding right and wrong, God and truth, and holiness and sin. Most of Babylon thought *their* faith was *demonstrably* foolish since *God* couldn't save them from Nebuchadnezzar.



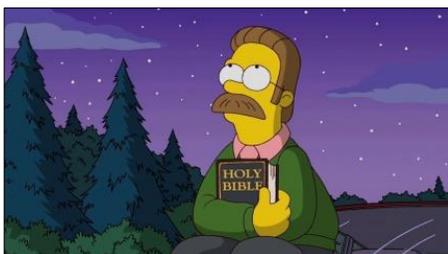
So how do we remain faithful in those inevitable uncomfortable situations that can daily challenge our faith? Well we need to be very careful not to overreact and run in one of three aimless directions. **One overreaction is imitation.** Reacting by compromising by accommodating too much of our culture in order to go with the flow and get along. **Imitators don't reject Jesus, but like chameleons their security comes from blending in with our secular surroundings.** Bold imitators may *publicly* say "Jesus is my Lord," but not "Jesus is *the* Lord," or heaven forbid: "You need Jesus."



And **the Good News of God's mercy is reduced to whatever's safe to say**, because *this* way *this* world is *happy* for us! "Glad *Jesus* works for *you*; *yoga* does it for *me*." The picture Jesus paints of a believer who blends in to the point of vanishing, is **salt without flavor.** Jesus said:

"Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? ["Be transformed, by the renewing of your mind." Until *then*] It is fit neither for the soil [where the Word is planted] nor for the manure pile; they throw it away." – Luke 14:34-35 NRS

Without a distinctive *savor* you got no Savior to offer *this* world that *this* world doesn't already have ... with *yoga*. **Another overreaction is isolation:** sheltering in the safety of the places where God's Word is honored, to the point where your entire life orbits around a religious subculture.



It's *technically* called "Christian Tribalism", but the Simpsons call it Ned Flanders. **Tribal Christians rarely really get to know many if any who aren't already like them.** And engaging "the people of *this* world" (as Paul puts it) in a meaningful, non-artificial, naturally relatable, sincerely spiritual way becomes increasingly dee-diddly-difficult. *Jesus* calls it **hidden light syndrome.** I added the "syndrome".

[I love the way “The Message” paraphrases this passage] “No one lights a lamp and then covers it with a washtub or shoves it under the bed. No, you set it up on a lamp stand so those who *enter* the room can *see* their way. We’re not *keeping* secrets; we’re *telling* them. We’re not *hiding* things; we’re bringing everything *out* into the *open*. So be careful that you don’t become *misers* of what you *hear*.” – Luke 8:16-18 TMNT



The third and **most damaging overreaction is indignation**: when our sharing is insensitive *at best*, and belligerent and *at worst*. **Salt is good ... over-salting is bad**. To Babylonians, indignant condescension looks like a tantrum. Because it is. Think Jesus was ever outraged by how the prostitutes dressed? **His outrage was reserved for the religiously indignant, unforgiving servants.**

[His master] said to him, “You wicked servant! ... Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?” – Matthew 18:32-33 NKJ

Being faithful in Babylon isn’t about blending in, but standing out; not hiding from, but reaching out; and not lashing out, but drawing in. It’s about being bold and visible and yet gentle, as we test and approve and *demonstrate* the life we have in Christ. **Take it or leave it, but *do* see it for what it truly, deeply is.** Know what God’s will was for those believers back in Babylon? **Settle down and grow up.** Know how I know? He asked Jeremiah to text it to ‘em.

This is the *text* of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the *exiles* and to the priests, the prophets and *all* the other people *Nebuchadnezzar* had *carried* into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. [*Who carried them into exile? Want to stick with that answer?*] ... the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those *I carried* into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: [*Nebuchadnezzar is never in charge*] “Build houses and *settle down*; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters ... Increase in number there ... [*See? Settle down and grow up!*] Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which *I* have *carried* you into exile. *Pray* to the Lord *for it*, because *if it prospers, you too will prosper*. ... For I know the *plans* I have for *you*,” declares the Lord, “*plans to prosper you* and *not to harm you*, [*Can you see His plan?*] plans to *give you hope* and a *future*.” – Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7, 11 NIV

So **if you’ve lost all hope, you can still have trust that hope will come.** Notice how His plans center around the extremely ordinary? Build a house. Settle down. Plant a garden. Seek the peace. Pray for their prosperity. **Don’t mistake common for trivial.** God’s first order of business is to **focus on improving the things around you.** You know: home, spouse, kids, Job, the polytheistic pagan society engulfing us. So don’t **imitate** or **isolate** or **indignate** (that’s now a word). God says “*I* carried you there.” So **infiltrate**. And He’s got *plans* for the *faithful*. So **insulate**.



I ever tell you about my uncle Joe’s shrimp boat? He took me out when I was young and we had a huge catch. And he boiled ‘em onboard in a *huge* copper kettle filled with sea water, to which he added 50 *pounds* of salt. When they were cooked, he gave us each a cup of melted butter and let us walk the halls of fresh shrimp to pick out the biggest and best.



Here's the point: those shrimp spent their entire life in that salt-water. So **why did Uncle Joe have to add 50 lbs. of salt to the pot?** Because they would've been *flavorless*. Why? Because **they didn't absorb the brine they swam in.** It didn't penetrate their armor. In the same way, our Father *protects* us by *insulating* us by *given* us the full armor of God:

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist ... the breastplate of righteousness ... your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace ... the shield of faith ... the helmet of salvation and [of course] the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. – Ephesians 6:13-17 NIV

Because **we are the visible body of Christ, called to calm the turbulent sea** that we're *in* but not *of*, because **we are the salt of this world, not the other way around!** And the more our minds are renewed – bit by bit and bump by bump – the more we reflect the light and the savor of the way our Savior *sees* and *thinks* and *feels* and *acts* ... down here in the depths of Babylon.