

R12.2 December 2022 Blog Engaged but not Entangled

The question we are addressing in this month's blog is: As a follower of Jesus Christ should I become engaged in the world around me or should I separate myself from the world? As a proponent of engaging with the world I would like to offer what I believe is a biblical basis for doing so, but not without condition.

First, let's consider two passages of Scripture:

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.²⁰ Therefore, **we are ambassadors for Christ**, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 (NASB95)

- We are ambassadors for Christ.
- It is who we are.
- It is part of our calling.
- Jesus came into the world to seek and save the lost (see Luke 19:10).

"For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (NASB95)

We should give these passages serious thought in terms of what it looks like in each of our lives. Differing circumstances, gifts, abilities, and opportunities will cause our role as Christ's ambassador to look differently for each of us, but faithfulness to opportunity is common to all.

I like the way *The Message* paraphrases verse 23: "I didn't just want to talk about it, I wanted to be in on it!" With much of Scripture we develop personal applications by asking questions of the passage. So, here are a couple of questions for your consideration:

- Do I really want to *be in on it*?
- Can I *be in on it* if I am unwilling to engage with the world around me?

Consider the following personal presuppositions to being a follower of Jesus Christ. Presuppositions are critical because they shape our world view, how we see life and how we see our purpose.

- Having been justified by faith and reconciled to God by the death of Jesus, I am His ambassador.
- As His ambassador I am charged with the ministry of reconciliation.
- To fulfill that charge I must engage with those in my world, my sphere of influence.

Now, what is the condition to this biblical calling to engage with the world? Paul provides the answer in the 1 Corinthians 9 passage above in verse 21, “to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ”. The Message paraphrases this verse: “I didn’t take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ.” In other words, Paul was **engaged** but not **entangled**.

“No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.”

2 Timothy 2:4 (NASB95)¹

The bible is full of warnings about becoming entangled with the world system. Here are two for our consideration:

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves 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 boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

1 John 2:15-17 (NASB95)

“...but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

Mark 4:19 (NASB95)

Application

First, an overarching question to consider:

As sinful men who battle the flesh, how can we protect ourselves and minimize our chances of becoming entangled as we endeavor to engage with the world around us?

¹ See 1 Timothy 2:1-3 for context in what it means to be a faithful man.

Here are three areas of personal application:

1. Spend regular time in the Word
2. Develop and adhere to personal convictions
3. Maintain fellowship and personal accountability

Time in the Word

It begins with the Word. Labor in it daily.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.”
Psalms 119:105 (NASB95)

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12 (NASB95)

Personal Convictions

“The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.” *Romans 14:22 (NASB95)*

As used here, a personal conviction is a restriction to what is otherwise a Christian liberty. A restriction that the believer imposes on himself, as if it were a command, in order to provide a “buffer” to keep him from falling into sin. For example, a person may have a conviction that they will not counsel a member of the opposite sex.

Convictions are not general commands, but they become like commands to the person who develops them. A word of caution: Don't let the developing and application of your personal convictions turn you into a Pharisee, by elevating them to the level of a general command and imposing them on others.

Since convictions are not commands, they may change or be further clarified over time as the believer matures in his walk with Christ.

Fellowship & Accountability

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

Hebrews 10:23-25 (NASB95)

And as our dear brother in Christ, Walt Henrichsen reminds us, “Because He calls you to be the friend of sinners, and because you become like the people with whom you associate, it is imperative that you counter-balance your association with sinners by a band of godly brothers and sisters that will provoke you to godliness.”²

Closing

As people who have been chosen to be ambassadors for Jesus Christ, we must engage the people within our sphere of influence, never forgetting that we are representing the Lord Jesus Christ and his values. Therefore, we must know and embrace His values and surrender to His will as we attempt to be faithful to our calling.

² See day eighty-six of Walt’s devotional, *Thoughts From The Diary Of A Desperate Man*.