

HOW INVOLVED CAN CHRISTIANS BE IN THE WORLD?

CHRISTIANS HAVE HAD A DEVELOPING AND OFTEN DIFFERING APPROACH AS TO HOW, AND HOW MUCH, TO BE INVOLVED IN THE WORLD.

WHAT ARE THE KEY DIFFERENCES?

For example, while some might feel that being politically active is an essential part of discipleship, others might be wary of doing so – and politicians may criticise the church for being caught up with political affairs.

Our approach to these questions is shaped by how we answer two questions:

Should we emphasise the world as fundamentally good, or fallen?

How active should we be in influencing the world?

Broadly speaking, different approaches could be:

Withdraw: Disciples are called to be separate from the world.

The world is “secular”, heavily affected by sin, there are two “kingdoms”, which God relates to in different ways.

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36)

Discipleship is about church and spiritual growth.

We should avoid watching films or reading books which are not “Christian”.

Critique: Disciples are called to critique society, but from the outside.

The world is fallen, but the role of the church is to influence by demonstrating in our life together and voicing what loyalty to God looks like.

Be “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation (who) shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.” (Philippians 2: 15–16)

The church is called to be a prophetic voice.

Watching films or reading books which are not “Christian” might be a “necessary evil” –to help us to engage with the world in which we live.

Cooperate: Disciples are called to look for the good in society and cooperate where possible.

Many aspects of the world are fallen, and our primary loyalty is to Christ, but God’s grace is outside the church, as well as within it, and there is good in society already.

We work with others to seek the good of all, and encounter God in the church, but also in the wider culture. “The world belongs to God, the earth and all its people.” (Psalm 24:1)

There is a need to be vigilant in holding the balance between accepting parts of culture but rejecting others at the same time.



Transform: Disciples are called to join in with the transformation of the world in every aspect.

As disciples in God's image, we are called to both develop the goodness of God's creation, and to join in with Him in restoring what is broken in every area of life. Jesus' restoration is not removal of people from the earth, but restoration of the earth.

No aspect of life on earth is unaffected. Abraham Kuyper said, "There is not one square inch of creation over which Jesus does not say, "It is mine!""

At a church leaders' conference, the convenor asked: "If corruption is the major problem, then why are we preparing our young people only to be pastors and evangelists? Why aren't we training them to be the godly entrepreneurs, economists, policemen, judges and politicians that our countries so desperately need?"

Christians are called to be culture-formers and not culture-followers – biblical wisdom can transform any area of life bringing God's justice, mercy and kindness, in a way that, for example, a consumer view of the world cannot.

Rather than there being separate "sacred" or "secular/worldly" parts of life, any part of life can either be "worldly" or transformed by Christ.

They would watch films or read books that are not "Christian", seeing them as reflecting the God-granted gift of human imagination and culture.



APPLYING THIS TO POLITICS

There may be times to emphasise one model over another.

For example, if we live in a very corrupt culture or under an oppressive government, we may need to "withdraw" to protect faith, or to critique prophetically.

Or the transformation perspective may lead us to agree with Desmond Tutu's words about politics, "I am puzzled by which Bible people are reading when they suggest that religion and politics don't mix."

We might remember how in Scripture God creates government to bring public justice, and calls governments to account.

God's kingdom is the only holistic source of eternal change – God wants to change both structures and people.

Worshipping with others regularly might be an important help in ensuring that our ultimate allegiance belongs to God, and not to any party.

The knowledge that we ourselves are works in progress – both good and fallen – might help us to be humble, learning and loving in the way we engage with those who disagree with us.

