

# Christian Ethics

Ethical Issues in American Culture

I John 2.15-17

# Culture

- The word comes from the Latin word “cultus,” which referred to something that was tilled, protected, honored, or clothed.
- The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also : the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time.” Merriam-Webster

The things a group of people believe will shape their culture

- For instance, what a group of people believe about animals will determine whether they eat them or worship them
- Since, for much of the western world, belief in some form of Christianity was common, culture was heavily influenced by the Bible.
- The Bible heavily influenced our concepts of property rights, justice, economics, work, leisure, and even the calendar (Rome operated on an 8 day week until Constantine decreed 7 days in AD 321)

- What “form” Christianity would take had been often debated: Roman Catholic or Protestant, but the acceptance of Christianity as trustworthy was rarely challenged

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, that began to change

- The Industrial Revolution brought widespread changes to the western world
- A wide array of new products were now available. Would they be beneficial for Christianity or not?
- A wide array of new social problems arose: waves of immigrants living in deplorable conditions, child labor, ever growing cities with their ever growing vices

- Darwinism became the rage, and Christianity found itself, for the first time in the western world, on the defensive
- The new “science” of psychology was being promoted-the very definition of human sinfulness was being challenged

The very nature of Christianity began to change

- Many Bible believers attempted to reconcile the Bible account of creation to evolution
- Religious Modernism began to reject the reality and the authority of the Bible
- The “Social Gospel” became popular: Christianity became more about social aid than spiritual salvation

- One of the leading advocates of the Social Gospel was the Baptist pastor Walter Rauschenbusch. He wrote *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, which argued that not enough time was spent preaching against what he called “institutionalized sin.”
- Books like *In His Steps* are steeped in the Social Gospel. The author, Charles Sheldon, was a Christian Socialist.

Some Christians resisted these changes

- And the world of “fundamentalism” was born
- Between 1910-1916, The Fundamentals (90 essays in 12 volumes) were distributed free of charge to Churches in America.
- Topics included subjects like the inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Christ, and the nature of orthodox belief

- In those days, to be a “fundamentalist” was to believe in things like the deity of Christ, in the inspiration of the Scriptures, and the necessity of individual salvation from sin
- Fundamentalism grew more militantly separatist over time
- It became not just a “pro-Bible” movement, it became vocally “ant-culture”

- This fostered division among the Fundamentalists
- In 1947, Harold Ockenga coined the term “New Evangelical,” to describe those who were conservative in doctrine, less inclined to fight against culture, and more willing to engage in scholarship and social change
- It is during these days that the “fundamentalist movement” began to undertake the steps by which many know it today

- It romanticizes a certain time in American history
- And tends to turn the application of doctrine into a doctrine. So II Timothy 3.16 becomes “The Bible teaches the inspiration of the King James Version”
- Which tends to leave people very confused about how to live a Godly life in an ever changing world