

Dissenters among the Age of #Trending

Text: Matthew 5:43-48

Introduction:

In the 1600s, Baptists (especially the English Baptists in the late seventeenth century) is known for their dissenting spirit (not just for the sake of “to dissent”). Baptists fought for religious freedom amid denominational control and State religion. Baptists advanced the biblical baptism even the entire Christian world sought pedobaptism (or infant baptism).

Where did the Baptist get this thought of dissenting? Knowing that Baptists later became known as the “people of the book (Bible)”, we mainly based our faith and practices on the authority of the Word of God. If the culture says this, we check and analyze if the Bible says so too or not. If not in the Bible, is it regulative or normative? Will this be in conflict with our goal to become more like Christ? If not, then we explore and make sure that everything that we will do ought to be glorifying God.

Because living in this postmodern world, we know that everything becomes relative or subjective based on whoever’s point of view it is coming from. The danger coming from the other side of this relativism is the anti-intellectual attitude of the people. Meaning, people tend to conform to whatever is the trend without even critically thinking about it or studying the reasons behind it.

In other words, they call it “mob mentality.” Whatever the majority wants or desires becomes the identity or voice of everyone. American psychologist Jane Loevinger said, *“We are living in a conformist world.”*

This is the sad reality. But this problem of conformity to cultural trends is not only true today but also even during the Old Testament and the New Testament times. Also, a short definition of the idea of “trending” is explained in our bulletin program.

Main Idea:

There are many things in this world that we need to critically study when it comes to cultural trends. But, as Christians, we are not called to expose or explore the deeper meaning or reasons behind it. Let us leave that to the scholars and academic institutions. Instead, we are called to dig deeper in the Word of God, and from there we apply it in our lives as Christian lenses for our individual perspective. To this thought of having the same perspective in Christ, we become one as the body of Christ.

Verse 43,

Now going back to our main passage. Before going further, take note that the one speaking here is Jesus Christ. He is telling these words during the Sermon on the Mount or the Olivet Discourse to His disciples—followers of Christ. So, we start from the idea that Jesus is the main speaker and His followers are his audience.

In verse 43 of Matthew 5, you will see the idea of a contrasting perspective as early as our first verse. Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said.” The following statement is a heavy claim that the world teaches “to hate your enemy.” None in the Bible teaches to hate your enemy. Hate is strong word and Christians were never told to hate anyone or anything unless sin.

Meaning, this cultural claim both before and now is a misinterpretation or misunderstanding by many Christians. It is easy to feel uneasy or get mad at those people who do not agree with you and even at those that offended you. Even I, myself, on our way to Washington Lake Park for the youth rally, Miguel and I stopped by a gas station for a restroom break. After washing my hands, I grabbed a hand tissue to dry my hands, but at the time after I grabbed one, a person behind me already threw curse words to me for blocking his way of getting a tissue. I was like, who gets mad for that reason? I was there first, and a gas restroom is always a busy place wherein.....anyway, this is not a rant. I am just illustrating how easily people can get mad, irritated, against someone who does not cope with their expectations.

The world says these things, but Christ says the other way around.

Verse 44,

Dissenting from the previous cultural ideology, Christ calls for a kind of attitude that is not prominent in this world. This love—known as the *agape* love—is unconditional and knows no ifs or buts. Indeed, as stated also in verse 46, “*For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?*” It is easy to love those people who meet our expectations or the ones who love us back or those who benefited us. But as Christ rhetorically asked, “what’s the distinction of being a Christian if we are just doing what others have been doing?”

There is a greater love than how the world teaches us to love. The pop culture, the Netflix culture, the anime, the social media world teach us a cultural trend kind of life. But as Christians, our love towards others must not be tainted by any prejudice, discrimination. Our love even towards our enemies is not optional nor selective.

You do not only love those people whom you just want or like. Rather, you ought to show compassion even to those people you do not want. Love your enemies. Love your neighbors. Self-love or loving yourself is not even the priority. I do agree to take care of ourselves and love ourselves. But loving ourselves not in a conceited or entitled manner. We love ourselves by denying ourselves and living our lives for Christ. We love ourselves by putting the interest of others, our neighbors, and our enemies before ourselves. Self-love is impossible without God’s love first.

This kind of love is set by God’s example. Usually known as the “common grace.” In verse 45, the world—Christians and non-Christians—receive the same sunrise, the same rain, the same oxygen, the same water, the same things. God loves because He is love. He does not love because You love Him. Remember that God loved us first even before you, me, us loving Him (1 John 4:19, “*We love because he first loved us.*”).

The following statement in verse 44, going back, “*pray for those who persecute you.*” Ohhhhhh it is already difficult to love our enemies, now this? Pray for those people who persecute me? Pray for them? Why would I?

During the last game of volleyball last Friday at the youth rally. Miguel told me, as we observe, that it seems James even Patricia was uttering short prayers. We do not know if they were praying for the opponent to fail a spike or shot or maybe praying that the opponent will win. Well, you all be the decider, the opponent won.

Margielyn Didal, our Filipina skateboarder representative, celebrated, praised, and was happy for her opponent’s success. Understanding the crab mentality of our culture, this seems new and unique. Why would it be on the main page or headline if that attitude or character is common today?

Again, praying for those who offended us is not easy, but is a-must thing to do for a Christian. Love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. In this manner, we can exemplify grace and show our Christian love because God told us so and God set it so.

Ultimately, in verse 47, “Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” Why would other people desire our Christian living if they can only see the same as how the world live their lives? What makes it different being a Christian, if I can also drink as much as I want, do vices, watch pornography, lust others, satisfy my fleshly desires, and prioritize money, successes, and fame?

This is the problem. If the world does not see churches, Christians as the salt and light of the world, then no one will ever desire to be a Christian. Brothers and sisters, exemplify Christ in your lives. Manifest grace, mercy, compassion, and love; pray for those people whom you do not see worthy of praying.

Conclusion:

The imperative statement, in verse 48, “*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” The term perfect there in Greek is *teleios* [τελείως], this means completely, whole, same as *shalom* [or peace] in Hebrew.

Our completeness or having a fulfilled or *maginhawang buhay* is not achieved by the worldly definition, examples, nor lifestyle. But rather, we can achieve this if we focus our eyes on Christ, live like Christ, and obey His words.

We dissent from worldly ideas not just for the sake of dissenting but for the sake of glorifying God in Christ through the Spirit’s divine wisdom.

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