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## CHAPTER 1

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# WHY ARE WE AFRAID TO JUDGE?

## THE FUTURE IS HERE

**T**he church is to be in the world as a ship is in the ocean; but when the ocean seeps into the ship, the ship is in trouble. I fear that the evangelical ship is taking on water. The world is seeping into the church so rapidly that we might well wonder how long the vessel can stay afloat. The church, which is called to influence the world, finds herself influenced *by* the world. If we as Christ's representatives can scarcely stay afloat, how can we expect to rescue a society that is sinking around us? We have bought into the world's values, into its entertainment, its morals, its attitudes. We have also bought into its tolerance, its insistence that we should never

challenge the private beliefs of individuals, whether outside the church or within it. In the face of cultural pressures, we have found ourselves confused, hesitant to act, unable to give a loving but convincing witness to the world.

Of course, there are also many hopeful signs in our culture. There are churches and individuals that are making a great impact for the gospel, and for that we are thankful. But for the most part, we as Christians have settled down to a comfortable kind of Christianity that demands very little and therefore, in turn, makes very little difference in the wider culture. When the world takes a step in our direction, we embrace it without a twinge of conscience. But a church that has made its peace with the world is incapable of changing it.

Today there is a myth that the world is more tolerant than it used to be because it accepts “both points of view.” If you were to stand on a street corner in the cities of America and ask, “What do you think of Jesus Christ?” you would probably get a favorable response. He would be described as a good teacher or as one who taught us about love. But we can be quite sure that the world speaks well of Him because they misunderstand who He is and why He came to earth.

Listen to His own words: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18). By and large the world of today has a favorable opinion of Christ only because it misinterprets Him.

Remember this axiom: The better the world understands the purpose of Jesus’ coming, the more it hates Him. What the world values, Christ despises; what He loves, it hates. Years ago, F. B. Meyer wrote, “Between such irreconcilable

opposites as the church and the world, there cannot be but antagonism and strife. Each treasures and seeks what the other rejects as worthless. Each is devoted to ends that are inimical to the dearest interests of the other.”<sup>1</sup> And yet, just think, most Christians think it is possible to follow Jesus without turning their backs on the world!

Generations ago, we heard sermons titled “Biblical Separation,” that is, sermons about the belief that we must separate ourselves from that which displeases God and commit ourselves to the values and convictions of Scripture. Many of us were warned about such things as movies, alcohol, tobacco, and a small cluster of other sins. This kind of instruction had its limitations because godliness was often defined in terms of the things we were not supposed to do. But at least we were taught that some things were right and others were wrong; there was an attempt, however imperfect, to distinguish the church from the world.

My generation claimed to be wiser than our parents. We said that the list of “worldly sins” was man-made and that we had to make our own decisions about these matters. Older Christians, who knew their hearts better than we knew our own, warned that if we began to tolerate worldliness, however it was defined, we would trip a series of dominoes and the day would come when the church would be filled with “worldly believers.”

That day is here.

Opinion polls show that the difference between the church and the world is, in some ways, indistinguishable. The sins that are in the world are in the church: divorce, immorality, pornography, risqué entertainment, materialism, and apathy toward what others believe. Officially, we believe that without trusting Jesus as Savior people are lost;

unofficially, we act as if what people believe and the way they behave really does not matter. No wonder our light has become a flicker and our salt has lost its savor.

Many believe that we have no right to judge anyone's lifestyle or beliefs. Our commitment to radical individualism and the privatization of faith has made us willing to "live and let live" without discussion, evaluation, or rebuke. We have lost the ability to judge the world because we have lost the ability to judge ourselves. We affirm certain beliefs and then act as if they don't matter.

No wonder the most oft-quoted verse from the Bible is not "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16) but, rather, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1 NIV). Even in evangelical circles we sometimes hear, "Who are you to judge?" The clear implication of the question is that we have no right to say, "This lifestyle is wrong," or, "This is heresy," or again, "This preacher is a false teacher." The one word that best describes our culture is *Whatever!!!*

How did we get here?

Why do we find it so difficult to say that some religious views are wrong? Or that some kinds of behavior are sinful? Why do we allow so much of Hollywood into our homes, pretending that we and our families are not influenced by the entertainment industry? Why do we allow false teachers and prophets to flourish without warning the people of God? Why are various forms of occultism practiced? These are just some questions we will be discussing in the chapters that follow.

Before we begin our journey, we must have a better understanding of how the prevailing ideas of our culture have influenced the church. We might find that we are more affected by the world than we realize. So before we turn to

speak about our responsibility as members of the church, we have to take a few moments to understand the challenges we confront in the world around us.

We've all heard that we are living in a postmodern society, but what does that mean? And how does postmodernism impact the church? Every generation must fight its own battles; sometimes the pressure points of one generation are the same as those of a previous one, but often the issues are different. But each generation must confront the world, either to change it or to be changed by it.

Today our challenges are unique, for no generation has been influenced by technology as has ours. We are bombarded with television, the video revolution, and the Internet. Perhaps no generation has had as many opportunities as ours; nor has any had as many pitfalls. In the midst of great opportunity, we have, I fear, turned from much that is good toward much that is trivial and even irrational. In our day there has been a mega-shift in thinking; this generation perceives reality differently from the way past generations did. Yes, people in general don't view life the way they used to, and we Christians don't either.

So let's take a brief tour into what is called the postmodern mind so that we might better understand the challenges before us. Then let's ask ourselves how we have been influenced by the world and what can be done about it.

## DESCENDING INTO DECADENCE

Truth has disappeared, and few have noticed. Before our eyes, the old thought forms are crumbling, and in their place we find new ways of seeing the world and our experience of it. Some of us grew up with assumptions that are being

discarded, and in their place are new assumptions that stand in direct opposition to the Christian gospel. Perhaps it is not too strong to say that war has been declared on the past in favor of a brave new future.

We can't understand postmodernism unless we understand what modernism was (and is). Modernism was the belief that reason had the power to make sense out of the world; the human mind, it was thought, has the ability to interpret reality and discover overarching values. It was optimistic, believing in progress; there was the belief that science and history could lead us to various truths that would help us interpret reality. Modernism attacked religion, particularly Christianity, because it believed Christianity was filled with superstitions, but at least modernism believed that truth existed and it was not afraid to say so.

Enter postmodernism.

The contemporary notion is that reason has failed to make sense out of the world. Indeed, modernism, it is said, does not have the building blocks necessary to construct a system of truths that would be applicable to all cultures. So the old assumption that there is objective truth must be replaced with the notion that there really is no "truth"—if by truth we mean values applicable to all cultures and all times. Truth, if it exists at all, does not exist "out there" to be discovered but rather is simply my own personal response to the data that is presented to me. I do not discover truth; I am the *source* of truth.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas modernism attacked religion as being superstition, postmodernism accepts all religions and gives a high place to all kinds of superstitions. Spirituality of every sort is now accepted without any suggestion that one point of view might be wrong and another right. Since truth is now



defined as my personal opinion of reality, it follows that we have any number of “truths”—about as many as there are individuals in the world.

Theoretically, then, postmodernism says that there is no independent standard of right or wrong, no independent standard of truth and error. Yet, because we are moral beings, not even postmodernists can discard all moral judgments. When postmodernists see something they don't like, they have new ways of describing what they see; they have invented notions that replace the concept of truth.

These new thought forms have changed the dialogue in our modern world. We had best understand our culture if we wish to challenge it.

### *Truth Is Replaced by Fairness*

As mentioned, time was when people believed truth existed, even though they disagreed as to what it was. Today a belief is evaluated not on the basis of whether it is true or false but by asking, “Is it *fair*?”

Think of what this means for those of us who believe the gospel. The idea that salvation comes through Christ alone certainly does not appear “fair,” given the many different religions in the world. Thus our message is ruled unacceptable no matter how much evidence might be adduced for it. In fact, what we believe, we are told, is based on narrow prejudice. Christianity is just our bias.

The same approach is taken in evaluating morality. Postmodernists say that morality, if it exists at all, is an exercise in psychology. So if you and I were to say, “I believe this to be immoral,” the modern mind hears us saying, “I have this prejudice.” We've all heard gay rights organizations refer to those who believe in the traditional marriage as people

who are bigoted. In other words, morality is not a matter of objectivity but narrow, personal bias.

Perhaps this illustration from baseball will help. Someone has said that a pre-modern umpire would have said, “There are balls and there are strikes and I call ’em *as they are*.” A modern umpire would have said, “There are balls and there are strikes and I call ’em *as I see them*.” But a postmodern umpire would say, “There are balls and there are strikes and they are *whatever I call ’em*.” So in matters of religion and morality, truth is whatever I say it is.

Our national icon is inoffensiveness. So if you think you have the “truth,” courtesy demands that you keep your thoughts to yourself. As a good citizen, you should have the civility to keep quiet about your privately held convictions (your prejudices). Even freedom of speech should not extend to making moral judgments about other people’s private behavior.

To put it differently, a new “right” has been found in the Constitution. No one should ever have to hear anything with which he disagrees! No one should ever have to hear anything that offends him. “Hate Crimes Legislation” is touted to be a defense of those groups that are supposedly unfairly singled out for bigotry and criminal activity. Whatever the merits of this legislation, we should be aware that the goal is to declare “offensive language” as a hate crime, thus silencing freedom of speech.

Some time ago such legislation passed in Canada. Authorities warned the *Focus on the Family* radio program that they could not broadcast unless they cut any portions dealing with homosexuality. The Canadian broadcasting board cited Canada’s “hate crime law,” which says it is illegal to speak of any group derogatorily. This means that pastors

cannot read Bible verses on the air regarding homosexuality, or they endanger the licenses of stations that carry them.<sup>3</sup>

Some take the argument a step further and say it is not just the perpetrator of crimes who is guilty; anyone who is not in step with the homosexual agenda is also guilty. Recall that after the homosexual Matthew Shepherd was murdered, a wide net of blame was cast that included all those who spoke against same-sex marriages and special rights for homosexuals. Thus since “anti-gay” expressions contribute to the crime of others, the postmodern stance is that such biases should be held privately—if for no other reason than because they are highly offensive.

Inoffensiveness also has impacted the political sphere. You may recall that after the September 11 terrorist attacks some businesses would not allow their employees to keep an American flag on their desks, for fear that they were offending other workers who were not in support of the war in Afghanistan. S. D. Gade, in his book *When Tolerance Is No Virtue*, says that the objective of political correctness (essentially another term for postmodernism) is to avoid invading anyone’s “attitudinal space.”<sup>4</sup>

The result is that we can bear only good news, not bad. You can say that Jesus has changed your life, but what is inadmissible is saying that He is the only way to God. For one thing, such statements are unfair because they make Jesus superior to other religious leaders, and this offends the majority of the world’s population. What is more, such statements cannot be objectively true but are only the reflections of one’s private religious bias. End of discussion.

Not everything about politically correct thinking is wrong. We Christians have often been judgmental, intolerant, and self-righteous at all the wrong points. We have been guilty

of racism, elitism, and doctrinal snobbishness. There are some Christians who could use a good dose of tolerance, especially when it comes to their relationship with other Christians. But notice this: We should be tolerant in these areas, not because not doing so offends people, but because it is the right thing to do. In other words, *our tolerance must be based on truth, just as much as our intolerance must be based on truth*. In the end, our judgments must come down to truth questions.<sup>5</sup>

The problem is that we are often intolerant where we should be more tolerant; and often we are tolerant where we should be intolerant. In a word, we are intimidated. I, for one, do not have all the answers in our confused world, but we must attempt to be true to what the Bible teaches and live according to the mandate our Lord left for us.

We've learned that for the modern mind, there is no court of appeal in the traditional sense. Truth is subjective, disconnected from argumentation and facts. There is "your truth" and "my truth" but no truth that we must both claim. So our criterion for judging religious beliefs and lifestyles is not truth but fairness.

### *Truth Is Replaced by Sensuality*

If individual perceptions are king, it follows that human beings will gravitate from the rational to the sensual. When God created man, two matters became inherently sacred. One was the sanctity of human life; the second was the sanctity of intimate sexuality. Today we have attacks against both: We have a society rampant with violence on television and on our streets; we also are obsessed with eroticism that destroys the sacredness of marriage.<sup>6</sup>

Our film and media industries have desensitized us to violence. In one study, when children were shown people

being shot on television, they accepted it without much ado. But when they saw puppies being shot to death, they were horrified, crying out in righteous anger, shock, and grief. They had been conditioned to accept the violence that kills humans and outraged only at the violence that kills animals.

By nature we are not driven by rationality but by our desires. Without the restraints of laws and religion, mankind always drifts toward his urges, his immediate sensations. Eve, standing before the forbidden tree, was mesmerized by its hidden powers. “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate” (Genesis 3:6). Her perceptions were more present to her than the commands of God. What she saw, felt, and anticipated was more alluring than obedience.

Left to themselves, human beings behave according to what feels right rather than according to what their mind and conscience tells them is right. Given the disintegration of basic moral distinctions, tolerance for any and every deviancy is in vogue. I’ve heard people say, “I can’t deny my own feelings; they are a part of who I am, so I have to do what feels best.” Years ago we saw a bumper sticker that said, “If it feels good, do it.” Today we have bumper stickers that say, “If it feels good, it is *right*.” As for guilt, if it exists at all, it is just a feeling that has to be unlearned.

Since the ego has replaced God, people feel free to do whatever is necessary to find pleasure, no matter who gets hurt, no matter what the consequences. Since there can be no moral judgments that are applicable to all people at all times, and since morality is nothing more than what “seems good to me,” no wonder we often hear the mantra, “Who are you to judge?”

Ravi Zacharias asks, “How do we communicate the

gospel to a generation that hears with its eyes and thinks with its feelings?”<sup>7</sup> That is an excellent question, but it is beyond the scope and intention of this book. I’m more interested in making sure that we have a gospel left to communicate rather than investigating the question of how it should be communicated.

Our challenges lie on many fronts.

*Truth Is Replaced by Mysticism*

Religion is out; spirituality is in. What this means is that people are “into spirituality” without having to believe any doctrines. Since we no longer have objective truth but only individual perceptions, it follows that it does not matter if these perceptions contradict one another. If what I experience is true for me, who are you to say otherwise?

Deepak Chopra unites religious mysticism with medicine and teaches that the basic substance of our bodies is not matter but energy and information. We must become aware of the flow of human energy centered in channels known as *chakras*.<sup>8</sup> Healing takes place when we correct the flow of human energy and any imbalances in it. This is done by passing the hands over the other person, but without making contact. No contact is needed because the *Prana*, or vital energy, extends a few inches above the skin.

Chopra believes that at the core we are love, truth, compassion, awareness, and spirit. He says, “I am perfect as I am!”<sup>9</sup> Our problem is that we do not believe this; if we did, we would be healthy, for we are the source of our own strength and healing. Evil is denied, and “truth” is whatever happens to work. Beyond this, people are encouraged to experiment with occult phenomena.

From time to time we read stories about the value of

prayer in healing physical ailments. In one controlled study, it was shown that people who were prayed for recovered much faster than others; indeed, there were even some evidences of rather miraculous healings. Most important, the report said it did not matter who did the praying, nor the deity before whom the names were invoked.

Whereas modernism said all religions were wrong, this new information about prayer apparently proves the postmodern notion that all religions are right. So today we are told that all religious points of view, no matter how logically contradictory, are equally valid. The mind, it is believed, creates its own reality. Ideas are “true” simply because I think them; truth is what I perceive it to be.

Understandably, we as Christians have a challenge before us, for our commitment to Christ commands us to make judgments in this nonjudgmental world.

## THE CHALLENGE BEFORE US

We can't blame postmodernism for the condition of the church, but there is no doubt that we have all been influenced by its tolerant mood. Many Christians feel no obligation to share their faith with others. They believe their own convictions are good for them, and it would be nice if others became Christians, but they do not see any urgency for others to hear the Christian message! Some time ago pollster George Barna shared a statistic to the effect that only 8 percent of adults held evangelical beliefs compared to 12 percent a decade before. Imagine what that same poll would tell us now!<sup>10</sup>

Many Christians feel embarrassed about the fact that we believe in universal truth, specifically in the uniqueness of Christ and His death and resurrection as the only means

by which we can be accepted by God. In an age when the greatest sin is offensiveness, and the greatest virtue is inoffensiveness, it is difficult to share a message that, at its core, is offensive to the mind of fallen man.

What is more, we feel intimidated, not only to judge the lostness of the world, but also to judge the condition of the church. We are embarrassed by arguments over doctrine and the pettiness that has often accompanied church splits. Repeatedly, we have heard how terrible it is that Protestantism has fragmented into an endless number of denominations and that these splits have been a scandal to the watching world. As a result, we are afraid that any judgments we make will only further these divisions and portray the church as at war with itself.

Others take the quest for unity a step further and believe that even the division between Protestantism and Catholicism should be healed. Not until all of Christendom becomes one in organization, one in vision, and one in doctrine will the world believe, or so we are told. Since the Protestant Reformation began over a disagreement in doctrine, some are telling us that doctrine must be minimized if unity is to be achieved.

So in a world where doctrine is seen as the enemy of unity, it seems reasonable that “petty doctrinal issues,” as they are sometimes called, must be set aside for the benefit of the oneness that will impress the world. To draw a line in the sand and say, “Here we stand,” is to further divide a fractured church. Unity at all costs.

No wonder we are afraid to make judgments! We are told that we should unite, not divide; we should show love rather than cleave to our personal biases. We are to concentrate on our own failings, not the failings of others. Let love



“cover a multitude of sins” is the banner that captures the mood of our generation.

Given such an atmosphere, we can better understand why we often have uncritically accepted the world’s values, its misguided tolerance, its entertainment, and its commitment to selfish individualism. We have preferred to be quiet, standing by and watching our culture drift, feeling helpless amid the swelling tide. In our timidity we have lost the credibility that is needed to be a compelling witness to the world.

Surely we must agree that discernment is in short supply. Schooled in the idea that we should “live and let live,” we have allowed worldly thinking to flourish. While occultism grows in the evangelical church, few are willing to sound the alarm; fewer yet are willing to identify the false prophets that abound or to give good reasons why the God of Islam is different from the God of Christianity. Thus multitudes keep being misled with nary a word of warning. We think it is better to tolerate error than to look ugly defending the truth.

And yes, we must admit that the church has often looked ugly. There have been unnecessary doctrinal disputes; there have been personality conflicts, and the egos of the leaders have often been the basis of division, bickering, and needless conflicts. But the fact remains that we have the responsibility of making judgments. We are to represent Christ in an age that pays Him lip service but endears its heart to other lovers.

Perhaps no passage of Scripture has been used as often and as effectively to discourage any judging of doctrine or religious teachers than the prayer Jesus offered in John 17. Since He prayed for unity, some people have understood His words to mean that unity must supersede truth. They have argued that since doctrine divides, it should be minimized for the greater good of reaching the world.

But did Christ intend us to understand that we are not to judge doctrine? Did He want us to understand that unity is more important than truth? Do we need to set our disagreements aside in favor of a “united” church to impress the world? And what should the world see when it looks at the church?

## FULFILLING THE PRAYER OF JESUS

There will always be tension between doctrinal integrity and unity. Jesus emphasized both in His prayer, and our responsibility is to find the balance between the two. In John 17:11, He prayed that His followers would be united: “Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.” A second time He prayed for the kind of unity that should impact the world, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (v. 21). The unity for which He prayed is so powerful that the world should take notice and believe on Him. This is a unity that should be visible, credible, and supernatural.

But let us notice the following.

First, we are explicitly told that He is praying for unity among His true followers only. They are described as the ones to whom Christ revealed the Father (v. 6); they are the ones who have obeyed His word (v. 6). His prayer is directed in behalf of those who understand His uniqueness. He prays for those who recognize that He is a prophet, yes, but more than a prophet. His prayer is for those who believe in His name for their salvation and life’s passion.

“I am not praying for the world,” He says, “but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours” (v. 9). He does

not pray for Judas, for he was not a gift from the Father to the Son; at no time did Judas belong to Him (v. 12). He prays only for His followers, that the powerful evil forces they would encounter would not disrupt their unity.

This most assuredly is not a prayer in behalf of worldwide Christendom as such; it is not a prayer for the visible, organizational unity of the church, regardless of her beliefs and teachings. Whatever we may say about contemporary Roman Catholicism, the fact is that during the days of the Reformation, the church had veered far from the teachings of the Bible, particularly in matters of salvation. To say that the Reformers should have maintained organizational unity even in the face of serious doctrinal error is certainly to miss Jesus' point. Unity among believers, yes; unity with those who teach a false gospel, no.

Jesus' prayer began to be answered when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and united all believers into the body of Christ. This prayer continues to be answered when new believers are granted the gift of the Holy Spirit and are baptized into the same body (1 Corinthians 12:13). This prayer transcends all denominations and groups; it is a prayer that transcends all races, cultures, and genders. It is a prayer for all who have been truly born of the Spirit in every country and corner on earth.

Second, Jesus prayed that this unity would be a unity supported by truth. "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). Here He prays for the purity of the church; He prays that His believers would be set apart for the Father's blessing and use. He is asking that the church would be pure, separate from the world, and committed to her mission. "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (v. 18).

What is the world to see when it looks at the church?

The world should be attracted by our observable unity, based on truth. Just hours before this prayer, Jesus told His disciples, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Since this love is to be seen, it is my opinion that Jesus was thinking primarily of the love that exists within members of a given congregation, not necessarily the broad organizational unity that many think is the key to winning the world.

Please don’t misunderstand. I’m not saying that outward unity is optional because we already have the unity of the Spirit. There is little doubt that we should strive “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” as Paul urges us to do (Ephesians 4:3). The history of the church is filled with many examples of needless division, either based on personalities or trivialities. The fragmentation of Protestantism has, at times, been a scandal that no doubt has made the world turn away in disgust. *But we cannot fulfill the prayer of Jesus by sacrificing our differences, especially when those differences lie at the heart of the gospel.*

What is more, it is doubtful that the world would rush to believe if only all the Protestant denominations dropped their labels or if giant rallies were held in a stadium, proving that we have now all become “one.” Nor, in my opinion, would the union of Protestantism and Catholicism cause a wave of conversions. Such a unity might initially bring headlines, but its effects would eventually dissipate.

People will be impressed when we become a community of caring people whose sacrifice for others cannot go unnoticed. Our fractured homes have produced a sense of betrayal and worthlessness that only deep friendships can begin to heal. Individual believers living the life of Christ shoulder

to shoulder with the skeptical people of the world will give credibility to our message. We must be committed to helping the poor, standing with the oppressed, and expending ourselves for those who have dismissed Christianity as irrelevant.

Intellectual arguments alone will not win a generation schooled in the notion that worldviews should not be judged by rational consistency or evidence. Christianity, rooted in the soil of history and reason, finds it difficult to compete in an age given to irrational commitments. But a life committed to the betterment of others is difficult to refute. As Francis Schaeffer used to tell us, the local church “should not only be right, but beautiful.” Love will win them.

Third, Jesus prayed for the *holiness* of the church. “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:15–17).

The church is to be “sanctified,” that is, to be a community of believers who embrace integrity, purity, and a passionate love for God. The values of the world are to be rejected; indeed, the Bible says of the one who loves the world, “the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

Mark this well: The love within the church *attracts* the world; the holiness within the church *convicts* the world. In the early church, great fear came upon the people when they saw the church committed to discipline and holy living. Unfortunately, as the world observes the church today it might see a commitment to love (which it views as tolerance), but I doubt that it sees a commitment to holy living. Yet we are called to both.

We are, says Peter, a chosen people, “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that [we] may

*proclaim the excellencies of him* who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9; emphasis added). I agree with Dwight Edwards, who says, “As today’s unbelievers observe God’s children living in radical holiness, in supernatural community, and in overflowing grace, they too will be provoked to consider Christ in ways that a thousand tracts could never do.”<sup>11</sup>

If the call to holiness is to be obeyed, we must have discernment. To be set apart for God means that we identify the world’s values and that we choose to live to the beat of a different drummer. To be in the world but not of it is the challenge before us.

How can we represent Christ effectively in an age of religious superstitions and radical individualism? How can we maintain that critical balance between holiness and unity? The sanctification for which Jesus prayed demands that we recommit ourselves to those truths that have made the church great.

## THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The purpose of this book is to redraw some blurred lines between the church and the world. It is to ask ourselves what Jesus meant when He said that we should be “in the world, but not of it.” We must understand the world *from* which we have been called, and we must also understand the holy calling *to* which we have been called.

In the pages that follow, I intend to shed some light on the neglected topic of discernment, that is, the ability to distinguish biblical Christianity from the counterfeit spirituality and values of today’s world. My goal is to help all of us become vigilant, high-impact Christians who love

truth and are willing to live by it even at great personal cost.

I believe that the church desperately needs credibility at this moment of history. I agree with S. D. Gade, who says that the most important question we face is, “What does it mean to be people of truth and justice at an hour such as this?”<sup>12</sup> Do we care? Or do we feel safe in our cocoon, walled off from a crumbling society? How can we be the church at this critical moment of history?

We must lovingly speak truth to this generation. We must not think that the task is impossible, for God by the Spirit works to convict men and women of the truth. We have help on our side. We have to model discernment and jealously guard the truth for the benefit of our children and grandchildren. Only a torch that is lit will ignite the next generation.

Of course we must be careful. We must choose our battles and season our judgments with love. When some people “think they smell heresy,” John Stott says, “their nose begins to twitch, their muscles ripple, and the light of battle enters their eye. They seem to enjoy nothing more than a fight.”<sup>13</sup> Others make the opposite mistake and believe that love requires them to overlook gross error.

Stott continues, “Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth.”<sup>14</sup> The balance is difficult, but we have no option but to attempt it. We must get the water out of the ship if we hope to rescue those who are drowning.

You might disagree with my judgments, but I hope you do agree that judgments are both necessary and needed. Let’s try to find out what Jesus meant when He said, “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1).

Our task is to make wise judgments in a nonjudgmental world.