



A Church Set Apart from the World

Today, we are living in an age where the boundary between the Church and the world is becoming increasingly blurred. Secular culture, values, and ways of thinking have steadily seeped into the Church, and in an effort to become a more “welcoming community,” many churches have embraced these influences. Sunday services often resemble stage performances, and sermons are frequently tilted more toward comfort and motivation than challenge and truth. The goal behind all this is clear: to make the Church more attractive to outsiders.

But we must pause and ask: does such a strategy truly align with the essence of the gospel? The growing irrelevance of the Church in our time may itself be a paradoxical indication that the more the Church seeks to resemble the world, the more it loses the transformative power of the gospel. Can a Church that mimics the world genuinely change the world?

The renowned British preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones once pointedly observed, *“The glory of the gospel is that the Church is absolutely different from the world; and it is then that the world is drawn to her.”* This is not merely a quotable remark, but a truth repeatedly confirmed throughout Church history. The early Christian communities drew people even amid Roman persecution, precisely because of their ethical purity and radical love both of which stood in stark contrast to the world around them. During the corruption of the medieval Church, reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli reignited the gospel by living lives that were clearly set apart from the compromised religious structures of their day.

In the Beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, we see a concise but powerful portrait of Christian identity: “Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...” These qualities are in direct opposition to the values the world pursues: power, success, pride, and self-actualization. Yet this reversal of values is precisely the way of the Kingdom of God, and the way of those who follow Jesus Christ.

The problem today is that many believers and churches find this “upside-down” value system uncomfortable or burdensome. There exists, in many places, a kind of “spiritual social pressure” not to appear too different from the world. As a result, the Church has become trendy in culture, tolerant in ideology, and increasingly relativistic in morality. But what is the outcome of this shift? The Church begins to lose its identity as a “holy people,” and instead is seen as just another nonprofit organization. The gospel is reduced from a message of transformation to a form of psychological comfort.



Ironically, the world pays the most attention to the Church when the Church is different from it. Just as stars shine brightest against the dark sky, so too does the Church shine when it is not swallowed by the values of the world. When the Church becomes indistinguishable from the culture, it loses its reason to exist. But when the Church reflects the holiness of Christ though the world may first reject or even despise it eventually the world is compelled to listen. Revival always begins from such distinctiveness.

This principle applies not only to the corporate Church but also to individual believers. In today's world, it is often considered wise for Christians to blend in, to maintain faith quietly without drawing too much attention whether in the workplace, at school, or in the public square. But the gospel calls us to live lives that are radically set apart. This is not a superficial or legalistic separation, but a fundamental difference in identity, direction, and allegiance.

What then should be our deepest longing? It is not merely to become "good people," but to become people who are thoroughly conformed to the image of Christ. And the more we become like Christ, the more we will be set apart from the world. This distinction is not a side note it is the very essence of the gospel, the mission of the Church, and the identity of every true believer.

It is time for the Church to lay down the strategy of imitation and return to the essence of the gospel. True love must be able to speak the truth. True influence flows from holiness. Revival does not begin with clever plans, but with clarity of identity. Only when the Church reasserts its distinctiveness from the world can the power of the gospel once again be fully revealed.

Rev. Sung Soo Kim (Vice Chancellor of The United African University of Tanzania)