

"UNDERSTANDING OUR TROUBLED TIMES"¹

(Romans 6:15-23)

(Chuck Swindoll)

Don't you sometimes just shake your head and wonder, What on earth is happening in the world? Over the course of my lifetime, I have witnessed numerous changes in the broader culture. Unfortunately, not all have been for good. If Christians hope to make an impact in this world, it's imperative that we first understand it. So let's take a look at three especially troubling changes that I see in our world.

First, I see a blurring of the line between right and wrong. In my lifetime, I have seen a move from a wholesome standard of morality to a wholesale and undiscerning emphasis on tolerance. Many in our world have replaced common sense with political correctness. We defend criminals more passionately than victims. Standing against same-sex marriage labels a person an "intolerant homophobe" and "out of touch with reality." Stating that Scripture teaches for or against some behavior or attitude no longer carries the weight it once did. In this climate, holding to conservative moral standards makes one look foolish. Why? Because there's a blurring of the line between right and wrong.

A second troubling change is occurring these days: I see a growing ignorance of biblical knowledge. There was a time, even in recent years, when theological thinking, biblical understanding, and doctrinal truth were our culture's standard guides for living. Politicians as well as educators quoted frequently from the Scriptures. Prayer was a part of every classroom experience in my elementary-school-age years. Pastors taught the Scriptures forcefully. Now? Sadly, in our times we have "a famine on the land—not a famine of bread or water but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11).

Third, I see an intensifying embrace of postmodernism. We have clearly shifted from a Christian era to a post-Christian era. We have postmodernism to thank for that.

Let me give you 10 quick signs to help you recognize postmodernism's presence in our world.²

- *No authority is valid.* Those who hold this position challenge authority, asking, Who are you to tell me what to believe? Respect for authority is virtually nonexistent.
- *No rules are valid.* This means that we should make up our own minds about right and wrong, following only those rules we feel are right for us.
- *Style is more important than substance.* Here we get the idea that reality consists only of image or appearance, rather than substance.



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² I have been especially influenced in the area of understanding our postmodern world by Woodrow Kroll's book *Back to the Bible: Turning Your Life Around with God's Word*. I'd encourage you to read it as you deepen your understanding of our times.

- *Morality is a matter of choice.* This mentality suggests that it's all right to live however we want.
- The cardinal virtue is tolerance. This kind of tolerance says that we must validate everyone's beliefs . . . except the beliefs of those who aren't tolerant. Ironic, huh?
- *Words have no inherent meaning, so true communication is impossible.* Words carry weight or they carry nothing, yet in our world the significance of words continues to erode.
- *Western culture is oppressive.* This mind-set says that someone else somewhere else always has an answer to improve culture that's better than the West's answers.
- *The line between truth and entertainment is removed.* So guess what? Hollywood becomes the source of truth rather than the Bible.
- *Images and fantasy interpret reality.* The unsavory images in video games or television become reality for kids who are growing up under their influence.
- *What people believe is right, so they can do anything to achieve a goal.* Postmodern thinkers believe it's acceptable to react any way they wish if they feel wronged, because whatever they believe is right.

Postmodernism presents numerous challenges for the believer in Christ. It's imperative that you have a plan to live well in spite of these challenges. *First, you need discernment.* Discernment keeps you from being deceived, duped, and disillusioned. Discernment tells you, "This situation is leading to a bad conclusion, so I'm not going there." People of discernment can avoid many of the pitfalls of living in this world.

Second, you need direction. Direction provides you with a goal to pursue, showing you what you ought to do. But direction also forces you to make hard decisions. Exhibit the courage to do the right thing in the face of opposition and discouragement.

Serious words . . . so much to think about. I know you care. But it is so easy to be swept along by the waves of our times. I urge you to become a serious student of the Scriptures. Let God's Word be your guide. Adopting this habit of relying on the Bible's timeless wisdom will do amazing things, as it helps you hone discernment and develop direction in a world that has lost its way.