

## Being in the world, but not of the world...what does that mean?

By Dr. Greg Wiens

A lot is written and taught today on leadership. In fact I get a little tired of so much being written on it. However, I am convinced that leadership is more critical for the survival of the church today than it has been for thousands of years. It hasn't been since the first few centuries of the church, or possibly the reformation that we have experienced such turbulent times.

In times of stability, leadership is less important. This is because when everything is stable, little needs to be changed. However in turbulent times, leadership is what keeps the focus clear in spite of everything changing around us. Leadership at every level (Strategic, Tactical and Logistical) keeps our priorities aligned while our culture, economy, politics, and communities change rapidly around us.

Historically, there seems to be two extreme responses to cataclysmic changes around the church. The first is to hunker down and become rigid in our categories. In order not to allow the chaos of the world around us, we huddle up and surround ourselves so as not to be impacted by these changes. We do this in various ways. Some of us will cause our belief structure to become fixed in a period of a by-gone era. It often looks like the Amish did several hundred years ago. Others of us hang onto traditions that worked in previous generations but no longer find any connection with today's generations. This looks like those who only sing hymns written during the reformation. Others of us lock our theology into a person or place that found comfort in times past. Have you heard of the "Young Reformers", who are attempting to revive the doctrinal purity of hyper Calvinism?

It is easy to become rigid in the face of change. But unfortunately in so doing we simply isolate ourselves from the culture which is dying and going to Hell. These are the very ones that Christ has called us to reach.

The other equally dangerous extreme is to become some identified with the culture and change that there no longer remains any eternal truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. These individuals (and churches) embrace all change as good and bring it into the church without viewing it through the lens of scripture. Many of the mainline denominations have traveled this path, since the 1960s set us on a course of change. Scripture is interpreted in light of the culture, rather than the other way around. Now their (Mainline) current debate of Ordaining Homosexuals gives credence to this danger.

The strength of the Church of God through these past 130 years has remained that we neither codify our belief structures nor accept our culture without reflecting on it through scripture. We have continually elevated the view of Scripture so that all of our traditions, beliefs and practices are subject to it. We have continued to change as a movement through God's Spirit to be his instruments of change in the world. I am glad to say that

our churches look different today than they did in 1950 or even 1900. This is because the world around us has radically changed and God has called us to interact with that world through his redemptive work and presence. If we are going to be effective in so doing, we must be changing. But we must never allow the scripture to be subjugated to our culture or convenience.

As leaders during these turbulent times, we must personally allow our lives to be submitted to the Word of God through daily devotion and teaching. If we are going to be Godly leaders and not just good leaders, we must ensure our lives conform to the image of Christ. This will only happen as we regularly study God's word and become obedient to it. It is never easy to stand in the middle as you get hit from both sides, and as a movement that is where we have been throughout our history. I pray that we will continue to focus on following God's word to be "in the world, but not of the world."