

Rebels, part 1  
September 15, 2013

Three of the largest religions in the world (Christianity, Islam, Judaism) agree on how the world began. All three believe Adam and Eve were real people. Adam and Eve were created innocent, unaware of good and evil. We could label this age as **The Age of Innocence**.

**Genesis 2:25 (HCSB)** *Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.*

During this age mankind was fully cooperative with God. Man was fully obedient to God. This obedience was not out of compulsion, or threat of punishment, but simply out of love. You might also say they did not know any different. They had never thought about disobeying God. They had never seen anyone disobey God. No one had ever suggested disobeying God. They loved God, and so they obeyed Him. Mankind had a wonderful, loving, trusting relationship with God. There was nothing spoiling that relationship.

However, this age of innocence did not last very long. It came to an end when Adam and Eve sinned against God. Satan tempted Eve by introducing a new thought to her, the idea of disobeying God. She was tempted to do so and gave in to that temptation. Then Adam followed her. And it changed the world. It ushered in a new age, the age we are in right now.

How might we describe the age we are living in right now? Well one of the first missionaries of Jesus wrote a description of this age. He borrowed ideas from earlier prophets. He is writing to a church in the first century AD. Let's read what he wrote.

**Romans 3:10-18 (HCSB)** *There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become useless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues. Vipers' venom is under their lips. Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and wretchedness are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

These verses describe the vileness and wickedness man. They describe sinful speaking (corrupt, dishonest, damaging towards others, & blasphemous), followed by sinful behavior characterized by aggression towards others. Both of these lead to an unsettled spirit. They are unhappy, miserable, and confused about what needs to change. He concludes by saying they have no fear of God. Yet, fear of God is part of the basis for a healed relationship with God.

As we look around at our world, we see exactly these things, don't we? There are some generalizations here. Not every person is swift to hurt or murder others. But they are general descriptions of our world. People want to say and do anything they want. They want to believe that as long as they don't physically hurt anyone, however they want to live is okay.

And the same time we see a growing dissatisfaction with life. People are pursuing all kinds of things to find happiness, and failing.

Two key ideas here are certainly true of all people to one degree or another. The first is that people do not seek God. Oh, there is lots of religion. There is plenty of spirituality. But it is all man made and self focused. God is not treated as a sovereign individual with a will for people to live out. Instead, God is treated like a build-your-own deity, that you can shape into any kind of God you want. He has no will of His own. He has no standards of behavior.

This ties into his last description, they have no fear of God. The concept of fearing God has its basis in believing that God is the all-powerful ruler over the earth and that we answer to Him. Therefore, if He finds fault with us, He can punish us. That is certainly something to fear. But people don't live that way. They don't live with the idea that they better figure out what God expects and obey Him. Instead, mankind acts as if God doesn't care what man does.

We who are Christians know this. We believe God cares enough to have sent us a Savior. We have put our faith in this Savior, Jesus, for the forgiveness of our sins.

So what should our attitude be towards this age in which we live? Paul, the early Christian missionary who described this age for us, gives us instruction from God on this.

**Romans 12:2 (HCSB)** *Do not be conformed to this age...*

Do not be conformed to this age. The J.B. Phillips translation says, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mould..." That is a good picture of what is taking place today. This age is trying to squeeze us into its own shape. The world wants us to fit in but accepting the beliefs, values, and standards of acceptance of this age. The world is trying to get us to conform to the new standards of what is normal and acceptable.

How? How is the world trying to get us to conform? First, people are using peer pressure. They expect us to go along with the changes to American culture, to adopt the new standards or quietly go along. When that does not work, they are using all forms of media to denounce us for believing differently than they do. When that doesn't work, they may turn to the courts. They will use lies and threats and anything they can to get us to change. The world is trying to squeeze us into its mold.

The standards of what is acceptable are changing. The majority of people out there, by their support or silence, have approved of the new standards. And they expect everyone else to accept the new standards also.

What are those beliefs, values, and standards? There are many, too many for this sermon. But let me point out some fairly recent changes to the standards.

For example. Marijuana first become legal in a few states for medicinal use. Now, two few states have approved it for recreational use, even though that is in conflict with federal law. But the president of the United States recently announced that the Federal government will not challenge state laws legalizing marijuana for recreational use.

This may well lead other states to adopt similar laws on marijuana use. If so, marijuana use is headed for normalization and acceptability by society. As it becomes normal and acceptable, it will become protected. It will be seen as a right. And those who speak out against that right will be pressured to be silent on the issue.

Another example of changing standards has to do with language. There was a time that certain words were considered offensive in mixed company of both sexes. A guy could hear those words in the boy's locker room at P.E., or in other situations where just boys were present. But you did not hear them in public, on the radio, or on TV. Now, some of those words are becoming normative. They may well become fully acceptable in a generation or two. And then those who speak out will be persecuted as old fashioned, or out of step with society.

Another example of the new standards concerns dress. Falling down pants on men, with underwear exposed has become normal. The exhibition of the tops and sides of women's breasts, has become normal. Even young Christian men and women have fallen for such immodest dress.

Another example of the new standards concerns homosexuality. Homosexual behavior is well on its way to becoming normative and acceptable nationwide. And already those who object are being persecuted.

These and other things that were not acceptable, are becoming normative and acceptable. And everyone,... everyone is expected to accept them. Everyone, including Christians, are expected to adopt the new standards. The world wants even Christians to fully accept the changes in society and culture that are taking place. If we dare to believe differently, we better keep such opinions to ourselves. The world doesn't want you to speak out or act out against the new standards.

In view of our age of sin, and the death of Jesus for our forgiveness, I urge you, be not conformed to this age. **Do not conform. Do not give in. Do not compromise. Do not negotiate.**

But be not conformed like Jesus did not conform. Don't speak angrily or belligerently about the way things are. Don't speak critically of those who hold such views. Don't call them sinners to their faces.

Instead, treat them with respect. We are trying to bring them to Jesus. We will not do that by offending them. So be caring and kind. Be respectful and polite. Listen more than talk. But when invited to share what you believe, do so honestly, passionately. Be like Jesus to them.

Do not be conformed to this age. This age will not last forever. Just as the first age ended suddenly, so will this age. It will end and a new one begin when Jesus returns. Keep your heart focused on that new one. The missionary John, describes it this way

**Revelation 21:1-4 (HCSB)** *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea no longer existed. I also saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look! God's dwelling is with humanity, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God*

*Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will no longer exist; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away.*

That sounds pretty good. The first age we could describe as The Age of Innocence. The current age is The Age of Sinfulness. We might describe the age to come as **The Age of Heaven on Earth**.

This age will be all about forgiveness of sin and eternal life. In that age we will live with Jesus and be focused on Him. In that age we will be free from the power of sin over us. We will be free from the devil and temptation. In that age we will be able to focus on God unhindered.

Won't you join us in that age? The key to experiencing eternal life with God is to first recognize your sin in this age. Admit to yourself and God that you are a sinner. Come to Jesus for forgiveness. He died for you to make it possible. Receive Him as your rescuer from sin. Turn your life over to Him as your Lord. And you too will be ready for the new age when it comes.