

# Gospel In A World Of Difference

## By Sherwood Lingenfelter

Announcer:

This session is the Gospel In A World Of Difference. Right? Got that right. Our session leader needs very little introduction. He is our Senior Provost. Senior Vice President Dr. Sherwood Lingenfelter. I think we all know him so one, don't we just give him a warm welcome at this time.

Lingenfelter:

Would you stand with me, please? For the reading of God's word. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created. Things in Heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible. Whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the Church. He is the beginning and the first born from among the dead so that in everything he might have supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation. If you continue in your faith established and firm, not move from the hope held out in the Gospel. This is the Gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Where you are, let's kneel together in prayer. Our gracious Father in Heaven, we come to you at this time and we kneel before you acknowledging your holiness. We kneel before you acknowledging your supremacy. We kneel before you, thanking you for the wondrous work that you have done in Jesus Christ for us on our behalf. We thank you, O God, that in Christ all of your fullness has been expressed openly to us. We thank you, O God, that it is in Christ that we have peace through his blood. We thank you, O God, that we kneel here completely holy and forgiven without accusation because of the work that you have done in Jesus Christ. We worship you and praise you for this Gospel. And we ask that you would be with us. Help us as we share it in a world that does not know you. We just ask this in Jesus name. Amen. You may be seated. I want to thank you for taking a little bit of difference in your life, for accepting the taking off of your shoes to come into the auditorium, for being willing to sit separated from someone, perhaps that you care much about.

I thank you for the opportunity to think again about what it is that we are and what we do now. I'd like to ask you a few questions as we start. How many of you were a little bit startled when you came in to be asked to take off your shoes? Would you raise your hand? Okay, good. How many of you have felt a little bit of resentment about that? Anybody? Come on, be honest. Felt some resentment? Okay, good. How many of you thought, hey, this is neat, this is something different. We're going to do something different? Okay, good. All right, so you got two different kinds of responses happening here. Some of you feeling resentment. Some of you feeling it was neat. Is there anyone up here close that felt resentment? Okay, tell me why you felt resentment.

Audience member:

Lingenfelter: Gospel In A World Of Difference

Because I don't like to be cold and my feet get cold.

Lingenfelter:

This gives a new definition to cold feet, right? Okay, good. Anybody else feel resentment? Okay, anyone want to share here? Okay, on the side. Anyone here feel resentment? Somebody back here? Okay.

Audience member:

[Inaudible].

Lingenfelter:

He thought he might have holes in his socks. Anybody else? Okay.

Audience member:

Same thing. Without bare feet, I wouldn't wear stockings.

Lingenfelter:

Okay, good. All right, so there was some sense of personal embarrassment, perhaps, that you might be embarrassed at this situation. How many of you thought this was something neat, something different? Okay, tell me why you thought it might be neat.

Audience member:

Well, I know you're up to something. And I wasn't quite sure what.

Lingenfelter:

All right, how about over here? Anybody?

Audience member:

I know you.

Lingenfelter:

Okay, you know us, so you expect we're going to do something funny. Anybody else? Okay.

Audience member:

It personalizes what you're going to say, because I'll remember this moment always.

Lingenfelter:

Okay, you'll remember this moment. It will be personalized for you. Okay.

Audience member:

It's a sign of respect in many cultures.

Lingenfelter:

Okay, good. It symbolizes and something that we're going to talk about today. Now, I want to share with you that your responses to this are the kind of responses that people that have to change to hear the gospel will have to your gospel. Some of them will be interested in it because,

hey, it's neat, it's different. Something unusual happening there. And so they might want to listen to what you're doing just because you're different and because that's something that is going on that they're not familiar with. Some of them will be resentful because you're asking them to change. You're asking them to do something they haven't done before. And so their response will be a response that comes out of something that is not really what your intention is for this event to have. And so in starting this whole exercise, I wanted you to begin to think about what it means to ask people to do something different, to become a Christian. That when you ask them to be different from what they are, it's going to begin to change the whole focus, to begin to think, hey, gee, I'm going to get on something that's really new and good, and they might come for the wrong motives.

Or they're going to say, hey, I don't know if I want to be involved in this or not. I'm going to be embarrassed. I'm going to be insulted. It's going to be something that creates something for me that perhaps I don't want to get involved in. Now, you might not even know that you're asking people to do things differently. I stood up front and with my back to you and read the scriptures because I didn't want you to look at me. I didn't want you to think about me. I want you to think about God's word. But, you know, that doesn't really work sometimes. Some of you might have been more preoccupied about why he's not looking at me than you were with the scriptures. Anybody here? At first were really more preoccupied with what I was doing than with the scriptures? Okay, good. Yeah. Some of you acknowledge that. You really, you see, were distracted by what I did instead of the scriptures. Now, when you had to get down on your knees to pray, did that distract any of you? Did it bother you because you're not used to it? Come on, be honest.

Did it distract you? Okay, sure, it distracted some of you, see, so when I ask you to do things differently than the way you are accustomed to doing them, it then distracts you and you can't concentrate really on what's happening. So in my intention perhaps to lead you, I distracted you. And I wanted you to see that because as you take the gospel into other cultures and you ask people to participate with you in things that are from your culture, they're distracted. They can't figure out what's going on. They aren't going to be sure of why we're doing this, and they might be interested in it because it's cute or because it's different. But in the long run, they probably won't catch up for a while until the distractions are taken away. So we're going to talk about the gospel in a world of difference. To begin this, I'd like to think for a minute just about that world. As I was preparing for this session, I didn't know exactly what all we were going to have in terms of the other sessions, but yesterday we had a film on the Muslim world. And one of the reasons I chose these activities as we came in is because they were reflected in that film you saw yesterday about the Muslim world.

People coming into the mosque, taking off their shoes, people getting on their knees to pray. Those are things that would be part of the Muslim context of worship. You saw in that film something about the emphasis on law and the ritual law that is part of Muslim worship and Muslim life. Now, one of the things that you should be aware of is that when the Muslim has those assumptions and brings those assumptions to his understanding of what God is, who God is, and what holiness means. The Muslim is going to be distracted if you violate his assumptions or her assumptions. For example, if you invite him to a worship service where you as a Christian are worshipping and you're all wearing your shoes, the Muslim is going to be distracted. If you

were all sitting together, male and female, the Muslim is clearly going to be distracted. In fact, I've heard Muslim men say, how can it be possible that you can worship with a woman next to you? Because you think about the woman instead of thinking about God. So if we bring people into our congregation and we put them into a context where things are changed, they're not going to be able to listen to the message.

They're not going to hear it. They're going to wonder why you don't have your shoes off. They're going to wonder why you're sitting next to one another, male and female. And when you sit in the pew and pray, they're going to figure, well, maybe this person really doesn't have any interest in the holiness of God, because to them, the holiness of God is symbolized by getting on your knees before God and recognizing God as the Holy One. So we distract from our message by the things that we carry with it as part of the baggage of our communication. The Buddhist world. Another world. If you go into a Buddhist temple, it's noisy. In a Buddhist temple, it's not really quiet at all. People can talk. They walk around, they do things. It's very, very noisy kind of place. You don't really have to be quiet in a Buddhist temple. In fact, it's one of the comments that people make sometimes is it doesn't seem to be a very holy place. So what you would do for a Muslim, you better not do for a Buddhist. In other words, you have a different context, a different set of issues, a different set of questions in the Buddhist world.

And if you go to the Animus world, there are, again, another kind of set of issues and questions. I remember a missionary in Brazil with Wycliffe Bible Translators saying to me, he couldn't understand why all the Christians in his community were sick. And we talked about this, and he shared more about this. He said, it's amazing. He said, all the people that are unbelievers, they're

healthy, and all the Christians are sick. Well, I said, why are they sick? He said, Well, I don't know. They feel that they're being bewitched. They feel that the spirits are against them, that the spirits are causing them to get sick. And so we looked into this further, and of course, they all believe the spirits cause you to get sick. And so what do you do about it? He says, well, we tell them to pray. Okay, yeah. What do they do about it in their own culture? Will they go to the shaman. Oh, well, do you do anything to help them get over this problem about not being able to go? Why? We tell them they can't go to the shaman. They're Christians now, they can't perform rituals. They're Christians now. What are you doing to help them then? Well, they're praying. Well, what do they understand about the power of prayer? Well, God will take care of it.

And it hasn't really answered their question because their questions are about spirits. And how do you deal with this spirit as opposed to that spirit? After all, the shaman knows that this spirit requires this kind of ritual and that spirit requires that kind of ritual and you're just saying prayer. We've got to know specifically that God really is going to deal with those issues. And so in that context, the Christians are worried to death and literally sick constantly because of their great anxieties. Now, don't think that's too farfetched. How many of you get sick at exam time? Okay, most of us do, don't we? We get worried to death. OK. And so you've got a lot of sick Christians who are not worried about exams, they're worried about spirits. And somehow we haven't dealt with the real anxiety about the spirit world in that particular context. Now, we heard about Europe this morning, and I didn't have Europe on here, but Europe is again a different world, a post-Christian world, a world in which people no longer believe in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, where the church stands for them as something that is from the past.



Great cathedrals stand there to look beautiful and tourists come and see them. But Christianity has no relevance to the modern world. And in this world we have atheism, we have animism, we have the belief in spirits. You heard what George said in the message before. There are more mediums in France than there are evangelical Christians. And so you have this kind of commitment to the spirit world and concern for those things. And somehow our gospel has to address these particular issues and help them to comprehend what the gospel means. As we think about this issue of the world, cultural context is important for us to understand. I'm going to just give you a little bit of my own special field here, cultural anthropology. For a minute. I like to talk about cultural context as the categories or the definitions by which people order their lives. Now, what we've done here is I've reordered your life. When you came into this room, I said you had to take off your shoes outside. I said that you had to sit women on this side and men on this side. I asked you to kneel for prayer. I changed the rules.

And changing those rules was funny or it was disturbing, but it was different. And so your attention was focused on the rules. Now, the reason that your attention was focused on the rules is because I changed them. Because you know that when you come into this place for some kind of activity, that there is a certain definition of what's going to happen. You don't have to take off your shoes. You can sit wherever you want, and that when somebody stands up in front, they're going to look at you instead of looking in the other direction. And when you pray, you can stay in your seat or stand up. Those are the basic rules. Now, I changed the rules, and it disturbed you. What I want you to know is that everything that you do has rules that are part of that context. Everything that you do. If we had said, let's go to a basketball game, then you wouldn't be

following the same rules. If we went down to the gym for the Biola Eagles to play, and I got up in the front and started doing what I'm doing right now, you all would say, Boo, sit down.

We're not here to hear you. This isn't missions conference, this is a basketball game. So don't bother us with this lecture about culture in a world of difference. You know, this is not the time, it's the wrong context. We came for basketball game, and the point of it is that basketball game, you do different things than you do at missions conference. Now, if we'd called this chapel, I shouldn't be using these kind of definitions in chapel. We're just supposed to study Bible in chapel. But this is missions conference, so I can get away with it. Okay, we can teach you a little bit here, not just preach at you. But the point of it is that every context you see has certain expectations that you expect will be ordinary and proper. In every culture in the world every context has the same kind of things. Everyone has its rules, and those rules are critical. Now, we think about worship. I already defined for you some of the rules about Muslim worship. Let me tell you a story about one of our students, a grad student a few years ago, Karen Tulsin. Some of you may know her.

She went to Morocco, and one of her assignments was to live with a Moroccan family. She found the woman on this last month of her work there, she found a woman walking on the streets. They struck up a conversation, and she asked this woman if she knew any place where she could live. And the woman invited her to come into her home and live with her. Now, this was a very nice arrangement. The woman was widowed or divorced. For some reason, she didn't have a husband. She had child. She needed someone to help her. So this was a nice arrangement for Karen, a nice arrangement for the woman. She was able to provide some financial support

and also to have a home in which she could live. It was a problem however, she found that shortly after that, she settled into the house, that this woman wanted to be with her all the time. And every time she was awake and in the house, the woman would come and sit next to her and talk. And Karen really couldn't get any privacy. Now, privacy is very important to Americans. Privacy is something we need. And so she began to feel very concerned about this issue of privacy.

So the first morning when she got up, she thought, well, I'll just stay in my room, and I'll have my Bible reading here and prayer. And then when I'm finished, I'll go out and greet my hostess. So she got out of bed, and she began to get dressed. And as soon as her hostess heard her stirring, she came into the room. Good morning. How are you this morning? So good to see you up. And then she began to talk to her, and Karen kind of sat down in her bed and waited for her to leave. And she didn't leave. She stayed there and kept on talking. Finally, she said, well, come on out. Let's get some food. And so Karen came out and got some food and no quiet time that day. That was distressing. She tried to get away into the room other times during the day, but she couldn't get away. Every time she went into the room, her hostess saw she was missing, came in to see her. After all, in good Moroccan culture, it's not good to let your guests alone. So the first day went by. No quiet time, and Karen was a little distressed.

She went to bed that night, and she thought, well, I'll try again tomorrow morning. She got up the second morning, she tried the same thing. The same thing happened over again. And at the end of the second day, she was really frustrated. And so the third day, she pretended like she was sick. She said, I don't want to get up this morning. I don't feel well. I'd like to stay in bed for a

while. And so his hostess said, oh, my. And she ran out, and she went over, got some of her neighbors, and brought a couple of neighbors back. And they all came into the room and sat down around her bed, because when you're sick, you're not feeling well. You need people to cheer you up. And so here she brings in a bunch of other women to cheer her up and to try to help her to feel better and get her so that she would be happy and be able to come back and join society again. Well, at this particular point, Karen is almost in despair. What can I do? How can I have quiet time, my time with the Lord?

The fourth morning she got up, she decided, I'm going to give up. I'm going right out this morning, and I'm going to tell her I need to have some time to read my Bible. And so she did. And her host said, oh, that's fine. Here, sit down right here. And so she sat down out in the living room. She said you read. You just read until you're finished. So Karen sat there and she read. When she was finished reading, she said, I'd like to have some time now and pray. Oh, no problem. She got out the rug, the prayer rug, and rolled it out and said, here, you can pray right here. So Karen got down on the prayer rug and put her head to the floor, and she started to pray. She prayed till she was finished. Karen didn't know how long it was, but she says, I often pray for a half an hour, 45 minutes. And so when she had finished praying, she'd get up and her hostess was just dumbfounded. Her hostess said, I never knew that Christians prayed. We never pray as long as you did. How can you pray for so long?

And for the next 2 hours, Karen had the chance to explain why she prayed, why she read her Bible, and why this was such an important part of her life. Every morning, after her Bible reading and prayer time, she had an ongoing conversation with her hostess about her faith, about

her love for God, and about her prayer and why she had this time. My point then in sharing this with you is that her hostess never knew that Christians prayed. Her hostess knew about Christians from what they saw on television. And what they saw on television were things like Dallas and Dynasty and other programs like that. And so to be actually confronted with a believer who really loved God and who spent time in God's word and who prayed in a public way that they could comprehend and know what was going on was really a radical thing to this Moroccan woman. Now, my point is that the Muslim could not understand the gospel until they saw it in a context that they understood. Am I relating this story to you? Is that so oftentimes people do not understand what we are sharing with them because we don't give it to them in a package that's comprehensible.

They don't see it enough that they can comprehend it and digest it in terms of where they are. Now, part of the reason we don't do that is because we're blind. You see, we get used to doing things in the way we've always done them. Culturally conditioned. We come in and I ask you to take off your shoes. Oh, what's going on here? That's different. It's not part of your conditioning. You're conditioned to know that you can do it the way you do it. And that's useful because you don't have anxiety when you know what's going to happen. In other words, you don't get upset. You don't experience anxiety. You don't worry about being accepted. You've got your shoes on, you have to take them off. Oh, I better look at my socks, you know, because people might not be happy with the kind of socks I've got on. Now you have anxiety about your acceptance, you see, and all of that then creates some tension and anxiety for you. So blindness is when we get used to seeing things the way they are and can't see that it can be done any other way.

Now, in the message we had yesterday morning, George Murray confronted us with one area of our blindness: equity. And he tried to challenge us with the possibility of seeing beyond the boundaries of our culture. Seeing in a different way, seeing outside of what everybody else is telling us is important. And I'm trying to communicate something of the same message to you this morning, that we get used to seeing within the boundaries and we only see within the boundaries and we don't see the way God sees. And then when we get so accustomed to those boundaries, then we begin to get into a rut that keeps us from reaching people with the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In studying missions and looking at the possibility of reaching people for Christ, one of the things that we become to realize is that there are all kinds of cultural barriers that get in the way of us communicating the gospel. These cultural barriers can be language, they can be customs, like worship customs. They can be needs of illness and health. It's interesting, I work in Suriname with Wycliffe Bible Translators in 1985, and one of the things that we found in Suriname was that the Pentecostal people were having much greater church growth than the Baptists.

And the question was why? And the interesting thing was that the Pentecostals were answering the major question that these people were asking does God know anything about illness? Baptists weren't interested in asking that question. That wasn't an important question. The important question for the Baptist was are your sins forgiven? And these people in the bush were saying, we want to know if God cares about illness. And so the Pentecostals were saying, yeah, God cares about your sins and he cares about your sickness, and God will handle both of them. And as a consequence, there were literally hundreds of people coming to know Christ in the Pentecostal churches and there were very few coming to know Christ in the Baptist churches.

Now, the reason was because the Baptists weren't answering the question that those people had. What does God know about illness? And what does God care about illness? And how can God help me with that particular problem? So you had these cultural barriers that got in the way. Now one of the issues that we want to try to work on is to get rid of the cultural barriers. In every culture you've got unbelief, and unbelief is the greatest barrier to overcome.

And only God can overcome the barrier of unbelief. In other words, it's impossible for you and I to change people's hearts. It's impossible for us to get inside and turn things around and get them to respond. You know that. I know that. Who can change your heart? Nobody can do it but God. And the same is true of their hearts. But if we got all kinds of other barriers in the way, if we've got other walls in the way, then we have a problem in how they can even hear that their unbelief can be challenged. And so the objective of ministering to people cross culturally is to remove the cultural barriers so that there is nothing between that person except the gospel and their unbelief. Now, in doing that, we're faced with the challenge of our own culture. And one of the things that happens to us is so oftentimes we take our own culture with us. To illustrate this with a little picture here, we line everybody up in rows and we stand in front and talk to them, just like we're doing here in this session, now. It's not necessarily the best way, and yet it's interesting.

I've seen this all over the world. I worked with a man with Wycliffe Bible translators in the jungles in the far western part of Peru, and we had people sitting down, stood up in front of them and teaching them about the gospel, teaching them how to read, just like we're doing it here. Why? Working with people in a little island out in the Pacific called Yap in Micronesia, and sure enough, church service in Yap, just like it is here. People sitting in rows, somebody stand up

front talking at them. And you know, it's really hard in Yap to get a Yapese man to be a preacher, because there is nothing in Yapese culture that says it's good to stand up in front and talk to people. In fact, everything says it's bad. And if you look at all of their meetings that they have in their own culture and society, there's always a group of about six to eight men sitting in a circle, and those six to eight men are surrounded by other people. And those six to eight men are talking about the issues that are important. But do we pay any attention to that?

Of course not. Because the way we're used to doing it is we have people sit in rows and we stand up in front and talk to them. Now, same thing happened in Africa. Churches I visited in Africa exactly the same as this auditorium. In fact, I attended a service in Yonder of the capital city of Cameroon, and I came away really blessed. And suddenly I was dismayed, because why was I blessed? It was in English. The hymns were all the hymns I had at home. The sermon was perfectly comprehensible and touched my life with illustrations from my culture and the congregation was mostly Black African. And I thought, why is it that I am in Africa and everything seems like I'm at home? The problem is that we have transmitted and transferred our culture so often instead of transmitting the gospel. Now, there's nothing wrong with Africans worshiping the way we worship. I'm not criticizing that at all. But what I'm wondering about is what did we do? Why did we do it? Isn't God capable of reaching people in their world in their way? I want to praise God that I went out to the Western Northwest Province in Cameroon and I went to church service out there and the music was just horrible.

I didn't understand any of it. It was all in their language. There was no melody to it. It was raucous and noisy. And I praised God. I said, Great, at least they wrote their own hymns here. I



mean, I say horrible. It was horrible to me. It didn't fit my ears. I didn't comprehend it. It was wonderful to them. It was their own expression of their own hymns, their own faith, their own relationship to God in their own forms and in their own music. And I praise God for that experience because it showed me that, yes, it's possible that God can reach us in our world in our own way. Now, as we think about this, I want to come back for a second to the issue of who we are, the human condition. I read earlier Colossians great wind blowing here. Colossians, chapter one, verse 21 we are alienated from God enemies in our minds. This has really been an interesting and challenging thing to me. As I think about this. The alienation from God doesn't come from our culture, it comes here. It says, each one of us are alienated from God in your mind because of your evil behavior.

And as I face this and examine this in terms of my own life, I realize this has clearly been true for me, that I am alienated from God because of my own sin and because of what goes on in my mind, because of my anxieties, because of my fear of punishment, because of my failings. And most of the people that I've lived with and worked with overseas have similar anxieties in their minds. I don't know of anyone that I've ever talked to in another culture that I really could communicate with and understand that didn't have some deep sense in their own being, of their own inadequacy, of their own alienation, and not really knowing precisely what they were alienated from, but knowing that they had it. And the challenging thing to me as we look at God's word, is to understand that God has left us in that condition. In fact, in Romans, chapter eleven, verse 32, in the Philips translation, it says God has all men penned together in the prison of disobedience, that he may have mercy on them all. I want to come back to what George Murray said yesterday and again today.

He challenged us yesterday and this morning with the idea that we are tracked by our own culture, that we are often more concerned about equity than we are about eternity, that we are concerned about vocation and direction more than we are concerned about becoming like Christ. And as we think about this, these things really come out of our culture. They come out of America. America says, what you're going to do, folks, and how successful you're going to be? And what career are you going to have? It's interesting. When students come to biola freshmen, one of the things they feel a great pressure is to choose a major. If they don't have one, they feel anxious. I got to know my direction. I got to know what I'm going to do. Now, really, all you need to know is to be like Christ. It's really true, because sooner or later you're going to understand the gifts that he's given to you, and sooner or later you're going to understand how God wants to use those gifts if you release them to Him. And sooner or later, you're going to find what you want to do. And one of the things that I have learned is the greatest challenge in my life is to wait on the Lord instead of trying to do it myself.

But unfortunately, our culture says, what are you going to do? How soon are you going to do it and are you going to be successful at it? And so we've become preoccupied with that. We become motivated by it. We become anxious about it, and we pursue it, and we begin to pursue it with all our might. And it's interesting. God says, we're penned in a prison of disobedience. We're all penned with the same problems. We are in the same prison. We're all motivated by the same motivations. And I want to share with you that every culture in the world has the same basic fundamental issue. All of them are pens, prisons in which people live, in which they struggle to try to achieve satisfaction for themselves, satisfaction for their children, satisfaction

for their families, and which they miss the tremendous possibility of being reconciled to God. The human condition, then, is one in which there is truly a need for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the problems that we have is that we have an illusion. If I can get my act together here, we have an illusion about a Godly culture.

One of the things that made Karen Tulsin frustrated is because she was under the illusion that the only way that she could have quiet time was privately in her room with nobody else around. She was under the illusion that the only way that God would hear her prayers was if she could do it in her closet or something equivalent to a closet. She was deceived into thinking that God couldn't work in any other way. The same thing happens to most of us. We are under the illusion that somehow the particular forms of our Christianity is the only way that God will work and that these particular forms are what we must follow. Some people see the gospel is getting people from their prison of disobedience into our Godly one. I would like say whitewashed one. We've whitewashed our prison. We make it look better than it really is. We don't really see it. That's why we're so preoccupied with things like equity. I've struggled with that problem in my life, really struggle with it. I know that it's always there. I struggle with all the problems that everybody else around here struggles with. You know, they're part of our prison.

And in struggling with those things in our prison, we are deceived. And we want to get people into the Godly version, the whitewashed version of our prison. And it doesn't really work. When you look at the church in Yonder, in Cameroon, it's just a whitewashed version of ours. Is the Lord really there? That's a different question. And we get asked, Is the Lord really here? Of course he's here, but he's going to be here working in your life. And that's what we've got to see.

The other thing is some people believe we can whitewash their pen. In other words, we can make their prison of disobedience a better place to live. We can somehow bring the gospel into their context, and we can whitewash that one. And I still think that that's not really what's going on. Some people think that there is a Godly culture, but I don't believe that. I don't believe that at all. I believe there are only Godly people living in a world of sin. So as a consequence, if we focus on a Godly culture or whitewashing this pen or whitewashing our pen, what we focus on is changing the external world.

When Christ is interested in what's going on within us, our relationship to Him. That's exactly what we heard from George this morning. He said, what is the will of God? That we should be sanctified in the likeness of Christ. That we should be changed to become like Him. I'd like to challenge you this morning with this thought the gospel, he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy, free from accusation. That's what we read. But he goes further in that text, and I love this. I was walking in Oakland, actually in Berkeley, just two weeks ago. I was staying in a resort hotel, the Claremont Resort Hotel. Beautiful place. \$100 a night just to stay there on a special deal. If you went there and you didn't have a special deal, you'd have to pay \$200 a night. Why was I there? The Westin Association of College's annual meeting. I got out of the hotel, walked up on the hill and on the hill behind the hotel. Beautiful homes all the way up. Looking out across San Francisco Bay. There's the Oakland Bay Bridge on one side. There's the Golden Gate Bridge in the other. Beautiful, beautiful view of San Francisco Bay.

And as I'm looking at all this, I'm thinking about my four-bedroom box in La Mirada. No view, just smog. And then I think back a little bit to my beautiful 1812 home in Clarkson, New York. 3500 square feet, an acre of ground. And Lord, why did you put me in La Mirada? Why do I have to live in this place? I have my Bible with me, and I'm trying to memorize some things out of Colossians, chapter three, and the verse before this is, set your mind on things above, not on earthly things, for you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. You know something? I didn't even look at those houses. I forgot all about them. And I got to the top of that mountain and looked out across San Francisco Bay, and I thought, you know, there are literally millions of people out there who don't know Christ, who don't know that our life is hidden with Christ and God. And they're living in places like this, and they think that that's going to provide happiness. But I know what happens there, because I know in my house and built in 1812 in New York, it was just a house.

I went in there at night, went to bed, and didn't even think about the house. I get up in the morning and left. Didn't even think about the house. It was just a place to live. Never bothered with a view. All beautiful fall color leaves in the yard, but you don't have time to look, you're too busy. It's just a place. And there was really no happiness in the house. That's why I came to Biola, because there was nothing there that was worthwhile leaving the call that God had for my life. Now, I want to challenge you with this today there are people around the world who are without Christ, and they don't know that our life is hidden with Christ. And as I look at you and I think about the choices that you're going to have to make in the next 20 years, you can do like I did. You can choose to run away from God. I spent five years running away from God. I pursued a career. I was successful at it. I was promoted more rapidly than anybody else in my department

at State University of New York. And I sat in my office one day, looked at my filing cabinets and said, is this what I'm going to do with the rest of my life?

How absurd. And God sent a student in one of my classes and said, you ought to be teaching us. I said, who are you? Well, I work with Wycliffe Bible Translators. My point is this that your life is hidden with Christ, that if you get sidetracked by the prison that you're in, if you somehow let that prison become what motivates you, you're going to lose it. And I'm crying for you because some of you are going to lose it. Some of you are going to leave here and you're going to make choices that will be like my choices. And you'll lose the opportunity to be all that God wants you to become. Let me tell you, there is nothing greater, there is nothing more satisfying, nothing more fulfilling than to find your life hidden with Christ in God. And it doesn't come by anything in your culture. It doesn't come by any career. It doesn't come by your family structure. It doesn't come by your worship. It doesn't come by any symbols that you have. It comes by your personal walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within.

That's the key. Let God remold your minds from within. You've got to ask the question, young people, how does the gospel conflict with our cultural world? And how does the gospel conflict with their cultural world? That's really the key. Karen Tulsin in Morocco was talking about a relationship with God that this Moroccan woman didn't have. And she needed it and she wanted it. There was something different. She never realized that Karen had it until Karen was able to break out of her own world. Until Karen was willing to get down on her knees and put her head to the floor and pray in a Muslim way. And it was at that point in time that that woman could

begin to see the impact of the gospel in Karen's life. The message you see is disguised by your preoccupation with your own world. You can't give it up. You got your Christianity so wrapped up in your culture and in your church and the kinds of things that you do in your church that you can't see that other people can't see, that you got to unwrap it. You got to get it out of those trappings.

You've got to make that gospel something that impacts people where they are. You've got to see that people in Suriname are concerned about their health and show them that God cares about health. And you've got to see that the Chinese are concerned about their families and show that God cares about family. God wants whole families to come to Christ and he's willing to wait until the whole family is ready, which sometimes we're not willing to do. We want each person to come on their own. And yet sometimes in some of those places, if we waited until the whole family was ready to come, we'd get the whole family. But when we make the person come because that's the way we do it in our culture, then that person is alienated from the family, and the family never comes. And so we've lost many for the sake of having one. Following the formula we use at home, I challenge you today question how does the gospel conflict with your cultural world? And question how does the gospel conflict with their cultural world? They clearly are different. Now, I'd like to conclude by saying this what does it mean to follow Christ?

Equity or eternity? Identity in culture or identity in Christ? So oftentimes we wrap up our identity in our culture. I know in my own personal struggle, this was clearly the case. Who am I going to be? That was really defined by everybody around me, by my parents, by my friends, by my colleagues. One of the reasons why I hid my Christianity in the State University of New

York was because of my colleagues. I knew that it wasn't really acceptable to them. I knew that my life really wasn't reflecting what a Christian life really ought to be. And I didn't really want them to even know I had any Christianity in my background. So I never let them know. I hid it completely. I hid it because I was pressed by them to conform to their world. I remember when the guy who was the chairman of the department asked me one day, are you really a Christian? And I timidly said yes. This was after I had begun to get back in fellowship with the Lord. And I said, how did you find out? I said, well, one of your students told me, so at least I hadn't hidden it from my students.

But at that point, I became ashamed of the fact that even though I had begun to follow the Lord again, I was still worried, you see, about what the world was going to say. You can't worry about what the world is going to say. You can't let the world squeeze you into its mold. Now, it's interesting. I have missionaries tell me that they're afraid of what their supporters at home are going to say. They can't be afraid of that either. If you're afraid of what your supporters at home are going to say about you following Christ, then you really better stand up and be counted at home, because they need to know that God works in a marvelous, powerful way, in different ways around the world, and you cannot let the world squeeze you into its mold. If there's anything else that you can take away from this session today, don't miss your identity in Christ, for we died, and our life is now hidden with Christ in God. Let's pray together.

Gracious Father, I thank you for this time together. I thank you, Lord, that you have been merciful to me, a sinner, Lord, that in those days when I ran away from you, that you sent one of your faithful servants to come and call my name and say, I still want you, Lord, I pray for the



young men and women who are in this room. I pray, Lord, for those that will run away. I pray, Lord, that you'll send a faithful servant and call their name and tell them you indeed want them. I pray for those, Lord, who will be faithful and who will not run away. And I pray, Lord, that you would help them to see that their identity is wrapped up in You, Lord, and that their whole being and purpose is to be like you. We just ask, Lord, that you would unleash us from the prison that is ours, Lord. Free us from the bondage of our culture and our society and make us, Lord, individuals who are able to live within that culture, to live within that society with a freedom that comes only in our relationship with Jesus Christ. The Lord help us to be effective ambassadors in our own culture and in the culture around us that we can identify with these people, that we can share in their heart, in their life, in their work, and bring them to a place where they can rejoice in the life that you have for them. It's in Jesus name we thank you and praise you. Amen.

You are dismissed.