

The Chameleon Syndrome

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Chameleons are interesting little lizards. We have them on our deck all the time. They live in the plants. When Norma waters, they dart in and out of the greenery as if they don't want a drop to fall on them. They're hard to see because they are the same greenish color as the plants. Sometimes you see them sunning on the deck. When they do, they become, by some natural instinct, the same dingy brown color as the board on which they are reposed. It's an amazing ability. Only those reptiles of the family of the chamaeleonidae can do it, I am told.

I have no inclination toward herpetology, but it seems to me that those who do so have made a mistake here. There's another animal which is disposed to change colors in accordance with its surroundings. It's man.

Just like the chameleon, man has this ability to look just like what is round about him. There is, in fact, a very strong pressure to conform. Most of us struggle, trying to resist the temptation to look like the world, trying to maintain our true colors. As Kermit the Frog says, "It's not easy being green." Especially when everything around you cries out for you to adapt.

There's a bit of hypocrisy in calling yourself a Christian and complying with the world at the same time. It's hard to spot a Christian when he talks just like world. It's hard to know that a young lady is devoted to higher ideals when her dress is the same provocative attire as the rest of society. And you just never would figure out that a fellow's a Christian when he frequents the same haunts as those who profess no allegiance to Christ. And that's what hypocrisy is--play acting. It's pretending to be something you are not. It's putting on a different uniform, changing colors to fit the occasion. James (4:4) refers to those who would practice such duplicity as "adulterers and adulteresses."

But there's another side to this business of the chameleon syndrome it seems to me. There are those among us who have the ability to change colors on Sundays--and maybe on Wednesday nights. They look like us. They use the same terminology, even have the same way of pronouncing things. They seem to have the same convictions about the church and its work. They know all the right names, can cite all the present issues, can even name some of the prominent preachers among their list of friends. But deep down, they are not of us. They just look like us. Their color changes back on Monday.

God warned us that we should be careful to not let the world draw us away. "And be not conformed to this world," He says (Rom. 12:2), a sure indication that there is a magnetism about our environs. In Colossians 3:1 we are told to "set your affections on

things above, not on things on the earth.” And in I Jno. 2:15, “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” The world wants us, that's for sure. God knew it would.

It's a difficult assignment, but we must show our true colors at all times (I Pet. 3:15). We cannot serve God and mammon at once (Matt. 6:24). The true Christian is the constant Christian, and his constancy is not determined by externalities, nor by circumstances, but by faith. He reasons by that faith. That faith is consistent and continual. He will be who he is regardless of the situation.

The chameleon is fitted with this interesting ability to change colors in order to protect himself. If we're not careful, we'll do the same thing: in order to avoid the pressures of the world--to keep from being uncomfortable--we'll adapt to our surroundings.