

## In the World But Not of the World

We could say that worldliness is anything which cools our affection for Jesus. This world will definitely do that, if we give it the opportunity. So, there is a struggle that goes on. We cannot deny that we live in this world. The challenge for us is to be able to live in this world and yet remain distinct from it. To be in it but not of it!

In Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, found in John 17, Jesus prays for Himself and for His disciples knowing that we will be out in the world.

(John 17:18-19) <sup>18</sup> As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

Our Great Commission is to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. That is mighty hard to do if we do not find some way to relate with the world. Some way to bring the Gospel across the bridge to where the world lives. Jesus sets the perfect example for us, as to how this can be done!

### **A. Jesus was in the world, not isolated from worldly people.**

(Luke 5:29-32) <sup>29</sup> Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. <sup>30</sup> And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

<sup>31</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>32</sup> I have not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

The Pharisees of Jesus' day thought that to be holy, you had to avoid all contact with sinners. So, they were shocked when Jesus chose a tax-collector named Levi (Matthew) as one of His apostles and then went to a dinner party where Levi invited all of his notoriously sinful friends.

Another time, Luke 7:36-50, a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus for dinner at his house. A well-known sinful woman came in uninvited, anointed Jesus' feet with her tears and some perfume, and dried His feet with her hair. Simon was horrified. He thought that if Jesus were a true prophet, He wouldn't let such a woman touch Him.

But what had Jesus said back in Luke 5:31? “It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick.” What good is a doctor who never sees sick people? So, Jesus was known as a friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19). If we want to be like Jesus, we also need to be in the world, not isolated from sinful people.

This refutes the idea of monasticism as the model of unworldliness and the stand taken by Simeon the Stylite. Unfortunately, many Christians will go too far in the other direction; not just befriending but condoning unbiblical within the Church. The Corinthian church was boasting in their tolerant spirit of accepting a man who was sleeping with his father’s wife. Paul was horrified and wrote to clarify (1 Corinthians 5:9-11):

“<sup>9</sup> I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. <sup>10</sup> Yet I certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup> But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.”

But before you head out to befriend worldly people, a word of caution is in order. Paul warned (1 Corinthians 15:33): “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’” So how do we be-friend worldly, sinful people without being corrupted ourselves? The answer lies in the second way that Jesus was in the world:

### **B. Jesus was in the world with a divine mission.**

Jesus came into this world with a clear purpose. In John 18:37, Jesus tells Pilate, “You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth...”

In Luke 17:18, Jesus said that He came into this world to “seek and save the lost.” John’s Gospel repeatedly emphasizes this idea by saying that Jesus was sent into the world (John 17:18): “<sup>18</sup> As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” The Father had sent His Son into the world with the message of salvation through faith in Jesus (John 3:16-18). He sends us with the same mission. Jesus’ mission is behind His prayer in John 17:19, “<sup>19</sup> And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.”

To sanctify means to set something apart for its God-intended use. In the Old Testament, the sacrificial animals had to be sanctified or set apart before they could be killed and offered to God. In prayer Jesus here is setting Himself apart for the cross. His mission was that as a result of His death, His disciples would be set apart in truth.

So, the way to be a friend of sinners without being corrupted by them is to stay focused on your mission. Your aim is not to carouse with them as you may have done in the past, but rather lovingly to warn them of the judgment to come and to tell them the good news of the Savior (1 Peter 4:1-6). But, don't expect them to welcome you and your message with open arms. This leads to the third way that Jesus was in the world:

**C. Jesus was in the world with a realistic mindset: He expected opposition.**

To be in the world and yet distinct from it because you hold to Biblical truth will result in hostility from the world. Jesus prays (John 17:14), “<sup>14</sup> I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”

God's word or the Gospel, as Jesus says (John 17:17), is truth. The world will tolerate us if we water down the Gospel and align it with the world's philosophy of life. But even if we say it graciously, if we pro-claim God's word as the absolute, unbending truth for all people, we'll catch the world's hostility. In John 7:7 Jesus said, “[The world] hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil.” The minute you say that certain behavior is evil, you will be accused of being intolerant and judgmental. If you are a real follower of Jesus and go into the world expecting to be popular and well-liked, you'll be in for a rude awakening. By all means, be in the world as Jesus was in it. But go with a realistic attitude: you will not be welcomed by all.

**D. To be distinct from the world, you must have a separate origin.**

Jesus was not of this world because He came from above. We are not of this world because we have been born from above through the Holy Spirit (John 3:1-8). Being born again sets us apart from the world that does not know God. Through the new birth, we have a new nature that desires to please God. We have a new Master, our Savior Jesus! We have a new power to overcome sin, the Holy Spirit who

dwells within us. We have a new purpose in life, to glorify our Savior in all that we do and to tell others the good news of His salvation. We have a new identity as the people of God, members of Christ's body, the church. We have a new destiny; we will be in heaven with our Lord throughout eternity.

So, the crucial question is, have you been born again? Has God changed your heart and your desires? Have you trusted in Jesus Christ and His shed blood as your only hope in life and in death? Apart from the new birth through the Holy Spirit, every attempt to be distinct from the world will be legalism or self-will, neither of which result in genuine holiness or lasting joy. As Jesus said to the legalistic Nicodemus (John 3:7), "You must be born again."

### **E. To be distinct from the world, you must develop a separate mindset that comes from God's Word.**

In John 17:14, Jesus prays, "I have given them Your word." Again, in verse 17, He prays, "<sup>17</sup> Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." And again, in verse 19 He prays "that they themselves may be sanctified by the truth."

In John 5:39, He told the hostile Jewish leaders, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me." He said (John 7:38) that "the Scripture said" the Holy Spirit would be given to those who believe in Him. He later called the Scriptures "the word of God" and asserted that they cannot be broken (John 10:35).

When He predicted Judas' betrayal, He explained that it was "that the Scripture may be fulfilled" (John 13:18). After His resurrection, He told the disciples (Luke 24:44), "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Luke (24:45) adds, "Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." Jesus was saturated with the Scriptures.

And here (John 17:17) He calls God's word "the truth." He doesn't say that God's word contains the truth or that it is one truth among many. Rather, its very essence is truth. It is the absolute, final, and eternal source and standard of truth against which all else is to be measured. God's truth does not vary from culture to culture or from age to age. All spiritual and moral truth is contained in God's written word.

Jesus says that God's word will sanctify us or set us apart from the world for God's purpose. Whether you are worldly or godly is primarily a matter of how we allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds. In Romans 12:2, Paul tells us how not to be worldly: "2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Our minds are transformed and renewed as we saturate them in God's word so that we think biblically about all of life.

So, to be distinct from this world, you must be born again and develop a separate mindset that comes from God's Word.

#### **F. To be distinct from this world, live in obedience to God's Word.**

Knowing God's Word is foundational and personal application is always the goal of Bible study. As you read and study the Word, always ask, "So what?" How does this Scripture apply to my life? Do I need to change the way I think? Do I need to change my attitude? Is my speech pleasing to God and edifying to others? Are there sinful habits that I need to destroy? Are there godly character qualities that I need to develop? Do I need to adjust my priorities and change my daily schedule? Do I need to be a better steward of the resources that God has entrusted to me?

#### **Conclusion:**

Worldliness at its heart is nothing less than idolatry. It is exchanging the truth of God for a lie and worshiping and serving created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). The world was created by God and He said it was good (Genesis 1:10). Sin came into the world by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. When men and women love the things of this world more than God they are engaged in the idolatrous sin of worldliness.

Worldliness can take many forms, such as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Adam and Eve were guilty of the sin of worldliness when they chose to believe Satan's lie instead of God's truth and ate the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6). Eve saw what was pleasing to the eye and good for food and chose the fruit over obedience to the Creator. Instead of obeying God's command to subdue and steward the earth, mankind began to love and worship created things (Romans 1:22–23).

When believers live in conformity to this corrupt world, tragic consequences result. Next week, we will look into the dangers of worldliness and compromise. We will use as a background the story of Lot from the book of Genesis. It will be helpful to read Genesis 13 and 19 for next week.