

Worldliness

It would be difficult to find a more important subject for Christians than the one discussed in this article. Worldliness continues to be one of the greatest problems facing the Lord's church now. And every new generation should be taught about the dangers of worldliness (James 4:4).

But if this subject is to be understood, a distinction has to be recognized between "morality" and "religion," for these terms cannot be ignored and worldliness comprehended. But in making this distinction remember that moral law is natural, resulting from creation; while religious law came by revelation, and must be learned. The principles of moral law are foundational to true religion; and since we are now under Christ, His law directs us in all we do (Colossians 3:17).

Religion differs from morality in the value it places on the affections. Morality requires that an act be performed on principle. The religion of Christ goes deeper and affects the state of the heart. For example, the church in Ephesus, from all outward appearances, was sound in doctrine and commendable in zeal; but He who understands the heart said, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Revelation 2:4).

Because people fail to see this distinction, they believe that they can live morally, but still be acceptable religiously. We will see in our study that worldliness encompasses many more concepts other than just immorality.

The Meaning Of The Term "World"

The word "world" occurs many times in the New Testament, but its meaning is not always the same (John 3:16; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). It is obvious that in these three passages the word has different meanings.

There are four common senses in which the term is used. First, it is used in the sense of the creation or the universe (John 17:5). This, certainly, is not the forbidden world of the text (Psalm 19:1-6). Second, it is used to denote the earth, a single planet of the universe, as the home of human beings (Mark 16:15). This is part of God's creation, and it is not, of course, the forbidden world of the text.

Third, it designates the inhabitants of the earth, men and women everywhere, apart from their habits or characters (John 3:16). This cannot be the forbidden world, for we are to love what God loves (Matthew 5:43-48). Fourth, it is used to denote worldly affairs, such as endowments, riches, advantages, pleasures, etc., which stir desires, seduce from God, and are obstacles to the cause of Christ. This is what the text of 1 John 2:15 forbids (Matthew 16:26).

Understanding Worldliness

Worldliness is the overemphasis of the world. It is the sin of being too concerned about material possessions and temporal interests. Virtually all sin is related to worldliness. This view is usually concerned with items, rather than with spirit; with the surface, rather than with fundamentals.

Included in worldliness is immorality like drinking, drugs, fornication, pornography, inappropriate dress, dancing, filthy language, etc. But some actions and attitudes are also worldliness, even though they may be morally right within themselves (i.e., work, pleasures, recreation, entertainment, television, etc.), whenever they occupy more of our interest and time than serving God.

Worldliness is deceiving. Like most politicians, it promises a lot, but delivers very little. It is an undeniable fact that there is pleasure in sin (Hebrews 11:25), but it is not all that it appears to be. To many, worldly living is the only true road to happiness and the only way to enjoy life. These people have been deceived. Satan will entice us with sin (James 1:14-15). Like a mirage in the desert, worldliness will lead us on until it consumes us.

Worldliness does not consist in only doing something, or in being certain places. A person might be in the most worldly atmosphere and yet not feel at home there, but inwardly revolting against the place and impatient to get away. On the other hand, one may be in a thoroughly spiritual atmosphere (i.e., in a church building) where New Testament worship is taking place, and yet not be in harmony with the spirit of the occasion, but far away in their heart.

The Christian's Relationship To The World

A Christian should hate the world (1 John 2:15-17). According to the text, worldliness consists in three elements: (1) the lust of the flesh (Romans 8:5-9; Galatians 5:16-24; Ephesians 2:3); (2) the lust of the eyes — desire excited by seeing (Joshua 7:20-21; Matthew 5:27-28; James 1:13-14); and, (3) the pride of life, which means an impolite and empty assurance that trusts in its own power and resources, and despises and violates divine laws and human rights; an impious and empty presumption that trusts in the stability of earthly elements (James 4:16) — the word as used in the text indicates a display in one's style of living. Verse 16 of the text summarizes all types of possible sins. They were all exemplified in the temptations of Eve and Christ (Genesis 3:1-6; Matthew 4:1-11).

When we see dangers of worldliness, then we will not love it, nor be engrossed in its pursuits (Colossians 3:2). We will love truth and righteousness when we appreciate the value of them.

The Christian cannot be friendly with the world (James 4:4). Friendship occurs because of common interests. Christians are going to have to make up their minds as to whose friend they want to be; too many of us want to throw our arms around both (Matthew

6:24). This does not mean that we cannot have friends that are not Christians, but it refers to intimate acquaintance with evil. Abraham was the “Friend of God” because he believed God (James 2:23).

The Christian cannot conform to the world (Romans 12:1-2). Conforming means to act in harmony with the world. Christians must be different from the world, yet many are not (Philippians 2:15). Many excuses are given: “Everybody is doing it;” “I am just doing what feels good;” “I am just trying to get along with everybody;” “It does not hurt anyone;” and, “It is really not so bad.”

A Christian keeps unspotted from the world (Ephesians 5:27; James 1:27). If we blemish the church, we will not be a part of the body presented to God. Just as the lambs offered under the Law of Moses had to be without blemish (Exodus 12:5), so must the Christian offer himself to God without worldly blemishes. The church is under obligation to remove the worldly members (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

The care of the world cannot get in the Christian’s way (Matthew 13:22). There is a great danger in materialism. We must be careful not to covet after, nor trust in riches, but in God (1 Timothy 6:7, 10, 17). There is nothing wrong with working hard for a living. But we need to be careful that we are not too busy making a living that we no longer have time to live for God or for our family! We are pilgrims who are passing through in this world. Don’t care so much for the world that you lose the desire for heaven.

A Christian lives godly in the world (Titus 2:11-12). Godly living has never been easy, but others have been able to do it (Noah, Lot, Moses, Joseph, etc.), and so can we. It is okay for the ship to be in the water, but you cannot let the water in the ship. Likewise, we keep worldliness out of our lives. No matter how wicked the world becomes, it can be done with God’s help (Philippians 4:13).

Worldliness therefore is a view of the present which ignores both the past, with its teaching and examples, and the future, with its promises and warnings. It is a view that one may hold quite apart from environments, whether rich or poor, learned or illiterate, whether inside the church or outside of it.

The World’s Attitude Toward The Christian

The Christian has to be different than the world. The world will not understand. They will hate us and speak evil of us; they will think us strange and fanatical (Matthew 5:10-12; 1 John 3:13; 1 Peter 4:4). The Christian should expect ridicule and scorn, yet should not allow such to pressure them into conformity. The world will try to pressure us to do as they do, but we do not give in.

Why Is Worldliness Forbidden?

Because it is incompatible with the love of God. Man must love something; and if he does not love God, then he will love the world. One cannot give pent-up water its choice

of moving or not moving. It has to move, in the right way or in the wrong way. The same is true with love.

Because the world and its lusts are transitory. Both the world and its power to excite forbidden desires will not last forever.

Because God knows better than we how to best enjoy life. The Bible was given, not only to get us to heaven, but to teach us how to enjoy life, receiving true fulfillment (John 10:10; Revelation 22:14). It was not given to prevent us from enjoying life. Contrary to what many think, all fun is not sin!

Because God's perspective is better than ours. He knows that sin ensnares and destroys. Sin is "for a season" but Christ is enduring. The whole duty and purpose of man is summed up in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14. Without Christ, people wander aimlessly through life, never knowing what life is really like and what it is really for.

Worldliness is a state of mind. Character is not judged by single or isolated deeds, either good or bad. It is the trend of one's life that determines destiny. When men and women are engrossed by the material (and sinful) parts of life, they are worldly. And those men and women who, despite their multiple mistakes and sins, still take seriously the teaching of Jesus, they are spiritual. Don't compromise with worldliness — expose it!

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