

Worldliness

April 24, 2010

1. What is worldliness?

It is embracing and adopting the ways and values of the world.

This is something Christians cannot and must not do.

1 Jn 2:15—“*Do not love the world [kosmos], nor the things in the world kosmos].*

If anyone loves the world [kosmos], the love of the Father is not in him.”

2. Problem: God loves the world, so why shouldn't we?

Jn 3:16—“*For God so loved the world [kosmos], that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”*

If God loves the world, why are Christians told they cannot, and must not, love it?

To answer this, we must examine the biblical concept of the “world” more closely.

3. What is “the world”?

1st, the world is creation.

Acts 17:24—“*The God who made the kosmos and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.”*

This is the “world” of creation, which is temporary because God never intended it to last forever.

1 Cor 7:31—“*The form of this world is passing away.”*

2nd, the world is God’s temporary stage on which the drama of redemptive history is being played out, God Himself being both its Writer and Director.

In Mt 13:37-38 Jesus explained the parable of the tares by saying, “*The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, / and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one.”*

3rd, the “world” (cosmos) is sometimes identified with the human race in Scripture because God’s purpose for creation and for history focuses on man’s redemption.

Mk 16:15—“*And He said to them, ‘Go into all the cosmos and preach the gospel to all creation.’”*

The disciples weren’t being told to preach the gospel to leaves and rocks and stars, but to all people (the “world” of mankind).

This is the “world” God so loved that He gave His only begotten Son to die for it.

4th, the world consists of all the wicked ways of thinking, behaving, and living that fallen man has brought into God’s creation with his sinfulness.

1 Jn 2:17—“*The kosmos is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.”*

When the human race fell into sin, its sinfulness affected and defiled the whole human race, alienating it from God.

Man’s godless, loveless, self-centered ways of thinking have become the norm in every society throughout the world.

Every human system of relating to God or people is tainted by man’s sinful nature, and is focused on man himself rather than God (e.g. government, economics, education, art, entertainment, even man-made religion).

For this reason the world cannot, and will not, be saved; it will be destroyed.

4. What makes the world in this fourth sense so bad?

The world's wisdom is the antithesis of God's wisdom; it points away from God and is the opposite of true wisdom which is from God.

It is a system of values & ideas which are pro-self and anti-God.

1 Cor 1:20—“*Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? / For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*”

The cosmos has become so identified with man's sinfulness that God, in His holiness and justice, will inevitably condemn and judge it.

Jesus said (Jn 12:31)=> “*Now judgment is upon this world.*”

G.W. Bromley: “So fully is the cosmos identified with sin and the Fall that the cosmos can only be condemned and destroyed in the judgment. It comes to represent the world of evil which is in irreconcilable conflict with the world of God.”

This means there is inherent antagonism between Christians and the world, but also a divide between Christians and non-Christians who are part of the world-system.

1 John 4:4-6—“*You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you [Christ] than he who is in the world [Satan]. / They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. / We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us.*”

1 John 5:19—“*We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*”

Satan is their lord and they obey him because they lie in his power.

Jesus is our Lord; we desire to obey Him and are empowered to do so.

The people of the world live in rebellion against Jesus.

The people who belong to Jesus are to live in rebellion against Satan.

For this reason the world actually hates believers.

John 15:19—“*If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*”

5. Where does salvation fit into all this?

Jesus came to save the world.

1 John 4:14—“*The Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.*”

God the Father sent God the Son into the world to bring the light of God's truth and holiness into its moral and spiritual darkness.

John 8:12—“*Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.'*”

Those individuals who follow Jesus by placing their faith in Him will follow Him out of the world's darkness into the light of eternal life; those who don't, won't.

John 3:36—“*He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*”

But salvation applies only to individual believers.

Not to the whole human race, except in the sense that, in eternity, believers will ultimately represent all mankind before God because Jesus will have saved every one of God's elect.

6. In light of all this, how are Christians to relate to the world?

1st, we continue to live in the *kosmos* (creation), but we are not to be of it, adopting its sinful, self-centered, godless ways of thinking, valuing and behaving.

In John 17:14-17 Jesus prayed on the last night of His life—“*The world has hated them* [“the who You gave Me out of the world”—verse 6], *because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. / I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. / They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. / Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.*”

Believers are sanctified and holy unto God, and we are not to allow the sins of this world to defile us by giving them a home within our hearts.

Jesus said, “*You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*”
(Mt 5:48).

Instead of asking, “How much can I compromise with the world, its values, and its ways, without crossing the line?” we should constantly desire to become perfect like our Father.

2nd, we are to guard against worldliness within ourselves.

The world’s sinful nature is spiritually toxic to our souls.

1 John 2:16-17—“*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. / And the world is passing away.*”

James 4:4—“*You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*”

There is to be a real difference between Christians and the world, which necessitates an intentional separation from worldly values and lifestyles.

2 Cor 6:16-17—“*What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. / Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,’ says the Lord. ‘AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.’*”

Here you had people in the church acting like people in the world.

The Christians of Corinth couldn’t stop associating with the whole world of mankind, but they were to stop associating themselves with men who called themselves believers but lived like non-believers.

3rd, we are to guard against the acceptance of worldliness within the Church.

In 1 Cor 5:9-11 Paul wrote this to the very worldly church at Corinth—“*I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; / I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. / But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called*

brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”

4th, we are to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all mankind.

In John 17:18 Jesus prayed—“*As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*”

Christ tells us as believers (Mt 5:14), “*You are the light of the world.*”

7. How do I know if I have become worldly?

Earlier we saw that every human system of relating to God or to other people has been tainted by man’s sinful nature, and focuses his attention on the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life—i.e., himself, not God.

It was mentioned that this includes economics, government, education, art, entertainment, and man-made religion, among other human systems and institutions.

Jesus taught us to pray, “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*”

So we can ask ourselves, “If God’s kingdom did come today, how would our economic system be different?”

Would it encourage us to become materialistic, building bigger barns so that we can relax and take our ease (Lk 12:18-20)?

Or would it encourage us to trust God, focus on our souls (vs 20), and use the world’s goods to help our brother in need (I Jn 3:17)?

In light of that, how would I live my life differently if God’s Kingdom were to come to earth today?

The degree to which my life would change in terms of my use of these human systems might be viewed as a measure of my worldliness right now.

How would my involvement in (and response to) government change?

What about education, art, entertainment, and religion?

In this way I can begin to analyze whether I have “set my minds [and heart] on the things above, or on the things that are on the earth” (Col 3:2).

And I can begin to answer the question, “How worldly have I become?”