

From and In - but not - Of the World

A Christian In Relationship To The World

Again, we appreciate everyone being here this morning, and glad to have this opportunity to meet together to sing, to pray, to break bread together around the Lord's table and to study from God's Word.

We're just studying in our Bible class on Sunday morning from Acts the twentieth chapter and verses 7 and following, how the disciples had met together on the first day of the week. And I think it's important for us to realize that that was the express purpose of their coming together on the first day of the week, to meet together to break bread. On that particular occasion, the apostle Paul happened to be there and we're told that he had talked with them for a long time before they broke bread, that even afterwards, he talked to them for a long time again. You might recall even that was the occasion where Eutychus fell asleep in the long talk and fell out the window, and then was raised from the dead.

But I call that to mind because I think it reminds us of something, that, even though for them on that night, having one of the apostles present among them, the great bulk of their time was devoted to hearing the things that he had to say, nevertheless, the focal point of their coming together was not really his lesson, or the things that he had to say, but the focal point of their coming together was in their observance of the Lord's Supper, their breaking bread. And so it ought to be the case with us. Sometimes we can be distracted in the fact that we may devote a fairly large amount of time to Bible study, a Bible class and then the sermon, and lose sight of the great importance of what we have just done in breaking bread together.

For our lesson this morning, I want to pose the question "What is a Christian?" and to try to answer that question only from one perspective. The single perspective that I want to try to answer that question from this morning, is, say, "What is a Christian in relationship to the world, the world around him?"

And I've even thought—I don't know whether I'll actually carry through or try to do this or not—but, as I was thinking about various topics for lessons during the course of the past week, I thought about just "What is a Christian," various ways in which that might be answered. And perhaps it will be the case that in subsequent lessons, I may talk about

"What is a Christian?" in some other relationship. What is a Christian in his relationship to Christ? What is a Christian in relationship to sin? Many other things of that nature.

But this morning, I want to talk about just one relationship, and that is, What is a Christian in his relationship to the world. And, of course, by "world" I don't mean just the physical, terrestrial ball that we happen to inhabit. I'm talking about the world as it is since the sin of man has come into this world. I'm talking about the world as populated by people. I'm talking about the world as populated by sinful people. I'm talking about a world that has been corrupted by sin and is subject to death, so that all of us, in spite of all of the accomplishments that we may point to, ultimately face the fact that we are going to have to die. Despite all of the hopes and the dreams that we may have for what mankind may achieve, we have to face the fact that we're as much sinners as we ever were. And that's the "world" that I'm talking about.

I'm going to suggest, at least at the beginning, that there are three prepositions that we could point to that describe the relationship of the Christian to the world. On the one hand, the Christian is *from* the world. Then, on the other hand, he is *in* the world, and then, finally, he is not *of* the world. So you think about those three to start with: the Christian is from the world; he is in the world; but he is not of the world.

Now, with those three in mind, let me take up the first: All Christians are people that are *from* the world. Now, what I mean by that is, we're all forgiven sinners. We are, none of us, people who started out righteous, and have never been associated with this world, and with the sins of this world. In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, he writes and talks about their state before they became Christians. He says, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."

He says, You used to belong to this world. He says, You used to be animated by the things of this world. You used to walk "according to the course of this world." And he says, In that situation, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins."

So that's the first thing that we have to come to grips with. We have to realize, when we talk about what we are, we are people who are from the world, who were brought up in and have been part of a sinful, corrupt world subject to the corruption of sin and death.

I think, sometimes, that fact gets a little obscured, particularly when someone has been brought up by godly parents. Maybe they've been brought up in a situation where they never really thought of themselves as being just completely given over to the sins of the world. Well, even there, a person really comes to realize their own sin, and the fact that they have been corrupted by the things of the world around them. But I would also suggest, that even there, even if you look at your own life and say, "But I was brought up by godly parents, and I never really lived a life in which I think of myself as just given over to the things of this world, to sin and corruption." That's true, but probably, you wouldn't have to go back many generations in your own family to find where that was the case. We are all people who are from the world. That's part of what it is to be a Christian.

In fact, the New Testament emphasizes that in our coming out of the world, in our being from the world, most of us in this world were not particularly prominent people. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 26, Paul says, "Consider your calling, brethren," then he talks about the fact that we weren't particularly prominent people. He says, "Consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise, according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble." He doesn't say there was never a wise or rich or powerful person according to this world, who was called to become a Christian, but he says there were not many of those. We meet only a handful of people who were of that nature in the New Testament. Most of us, having come out of the world, came out as not particularly prominent people.

As a matter of fact, James says somewhat the same thing, in James chapter 2 in verse 5, he says, "Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith?"

And I think as we think about what it is to be a Christian, we might reflect on the implications of that. You know, Christians are from the world and there's always a tendency, a pull back towards it. And I think about in the process of raising children how, you know, one of the things you're supposed to emphasize to the children is they can be anything they want, and all the great things that they can achieve in this world.

They can be president of a bank, or they can be president of a college, or they can be the President of the United States, or they can do this, that, or the other. It doesn't have to be a president, I guess, but anyway, the wide world is open before you and you can achieve greatness and you can do anything that you want. But I wonder if by encouraging children to live up to that dream, you know, that goal, you can be anything that you want in the world, we're encouraging them to achieve greatness in this world, to achieve the very thing that may well work against their ultimately choosing Christ over this world. Because the more successful, the more powerful, the more influential, the more well-received, the more honored by this world our children become, the tougher they're going to find it to leave that world behind, the more they're going to find themselves in that class of people not many of whom are called, not many of whom respond to the Gospel when they hear it proclaimed. But that's my first point, very simply, that all Christians are from the world.

My second point, in connection with that, is that we are *in* the world. We talk about being from the world. That would imply that we're no longer there. There is obviously a sense in which all Christians are still in the world. I mean, as we are trying to look and examine ourselves this morning, we live in this world. We're part of it: We work with people in the world; in some cases, spouses and family members may be people that are still in the world. We are in the world, but as we'll say in a moment, not of the world. In the Gospel of John chapter 17, Jesus is praying there for His own disciples, and in John chapter 17, especially in verses 15 and 16, He asks His Father as follows. He says, "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one." He says, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." We have an expression that we use that I've already alluded to, to be in the world, but not of the world.

And here, Jesus in praying for the disciples, He said to His Father, I'm not asking You just to remove them from this world, from this earth—to protect them from sin, from corruption, from the things that are in this world, but not to remove them from this world. It's part of God's plan and purpose that His people should indeed, even though being called out of the world in a spiritual sense, continue to live in this world. That was Jesus' own situation, that He was in the world, but not of the world. And that's what He prays for His disciples.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul was talking to members of the church there at Corinth, writing to members of the church there at Corinth, about a sinful member who had continued to be well-received in their midst despite his sexual immorality, his living with his father's wife, and he told them to separate themselves from those, but then he qualifies that. And he goes on to say, in verse 9, 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 9, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral people." He says, "I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous or swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world." I'm talking about, we'd have to actually somehow physically transport ourselves out of the world. And so, it is the very nature of the case that we as Christians live in this world, and we're going to have associations. We're going to have associations, whether at school, whether at work, our neighbors. We are going to have associations with people that are not Christians. And, while we need to be wise in those associations, we are not counseled in the Scripture to have nothing to do with the people of this world. If that were the case, we'd never be able to save them. We'd never be able to reach them with the Gospel. And, as a matter of fact, in our association with people of the world, we would do well to remember that we are ourselves from the world, that we ourselves were once in exactly the same situation that they are originally in. So, while we are from the world, and presently in the world, nevertheless, we are not of the world. "Not of the world" because what it means to be a Christian is, in the spiritual sense, to be called out of this world.

In Colossians chapter 1 and verse 13, Colossians chapter 1 and verse 13, Paul gives thanks to God for the salvation that we have in Christ. In describing what Christ has done for us, he says, "For he delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son."

That's what it is to be a Christian, to be delivered out of the kingdom of darkness. The kingdom of darkness there just means the kingdom of this world. That's somewhat the same terminology that was being used back in Ephesians chapter 2 when it talked about this world and the course of this world, that it's ruled by the prince of the power of the air, that is, by Satan himself. This is Satan's kingdom. And he says we have been delivered out of that kingdom, that domain of darkness, and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God. Jesus Himself said, when He was asked, "My kingdom is not of this world," and, of course, He identified Satan as the prince of this world.

You know, that's something that's probably, I think, very hard for us normally to think in terms of, but, in the Bible, there really are only two kingdoms—oh, I recognize there are various kingdoms in the sense of this political state and that political state, but ultimately, there are only two kingdoms. There's the kingdom of God and there's everything else. And everything else belongs to Satan. We have a hard time, probably, thinking of our own country as being a kingdom that ultimately, as far as this world is concerned, belongs to Satan. We say, "No, no, this is a Christian nation, good and noble, and all of that." No, this is a kingdom like other kingdoms of men. And while we have been blessed with the fact that there has been a powerful influence of Christianity in this kingdom and in this state, it is still ultimately a kingdom of man and it is destined to go the way of all the kingdoms of men. The kingdom where we have salvation is the kingdom of God. And we have been delivered out of all of that which is ruled by Satan in this world, to enter a kingdom that is not of this world, the kingdom of Christ Himself.

Galatians chapter 1 in verse 4. We're told that Jesus gave Himself to deliver us out of this present world. Galatians chapter 6 and verse 14: Paul talks about being crucified to the world, dead to that world. And in 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 4, Peter talks about the fact that we have escaped the corruption that is in the world.

Now, the point is, once again, with those three little prepositions right there, a Christian is somebody who is *from* the world, he's still *in* the world, in the physical sense, but in the spiritual sense, he's not *of* the world.

I want to talk just a little bit about what it ought to mean to us to say that we are not *of* the world. I would suggest that means that we don't love the world. The passage that Bob read for us a few moments ago from 1 John chapter 2 verses 15 through 17. Go back, if you're following along in your Bible, go back and read those verses once again. Think about what that really means, not the whole of it on this occasion, but notice especially in verses 15, 16, and 17. It's very clear: He says, "Do not love the world." Now, let me pause.

There is a powerful allure to the world. We, as Christians, despite saying, "We're in the world, but not of the world," we are *drawn* to it. If that weren't the case, John wouldn't be writing here, admonishing these people not to love the world.

The very fact that he addresses this is indicative of what we all know, that there's a great temptation there. He says, "Do not love the world nor the things of the world." And that's interesting to me that he qualifies that because a lot of us, we say, "No, I don't love the world. Now, I love my home, I love this, I love this," you know, we talk about all the things of the world that we love. He says, "Don't..." It's all the same thing, really. Don't love the world or the things of the world. He says, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." These are mutually exclusive. And he says, not only that, "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is of the world." And those are things that we normally see people proud of. And he says, Those things that are the allure, the drawing power of the world, he says, they are not from the Father. Verse 17, and "the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever."

Sometimes people look back longingly to a world that they have left. And I think we have trouble with that. I think we often have trouble having really the sense that we have escaped from the corruption of the world. As Peter says in the passage we alluded to in 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 4, we don't think of ourselves so much as having escaped from the world, we think sometimes of ourselves as being kind of forced into exile from a beautiful land.

There is a powerful allure in the world. The world looks beautiful to sinful man, and man's constantly deceived into thinking he can fix the things that are wrong. You know, it's, I guess, part of our sinful human nature to just somehow have this optimism that we can always make things better.

In many ways I think that's what drives a lot of human society and human government, that somehow we can bring about a really peaceful society; somehow we can bring about a society where there's no poverty; somehow we can bring about a society where there's no disease, you know, that we can fix all of the things. And that's a big lie. The truth is all of those things are here to stay. We may shift them, from one disease to another. We may shift poverty from one nation to another, one segment of society to another. There are all types of things that we may shift and move around, but they're all part of what this world is because man is a sinner, and the only escape from that--put it another way--there's no fixing of all of that in any permanent and ultimate basis in this world.

The only real deliverance is, indeed, deliverance out of this world and escape from that. And that's such a deception. It's so easy for us as Christians to fall prey to that, and begin to think that somehow, because we're Christians, we can fix the things of this world. We can't really fix this world. We can show people a way out of this world. We can show people how to be delivered from the corruptions, how they can escape from the corruption that is in this world through sin. "Do not love the world," says John.

James says, James chapter 4 and verse 4, that "friendship with the world is enmity with God." Let me read those verses and even a little bit of the larger context right there. James chapter 4 in verse 1, he says, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" In other words, it is the very beauty, the very allure, the very pleasure of this world that is the source of all the problems. He says, "You lust and do not have; you commit murder. You're envious and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives." Verse 4, he says, "You adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

Again, they're mutually exclusive. John said the same thing: You can't love the world and the things of the world. If you do, the love of the Father is not in you. Paul said in Romans chapter 12 in verse 2 that we are not to be conformed to this world. Not only is the world beautiful, it does not appear as an evil monster. It appears as a beautiful paradise, but it also has a powerful molding effect, to shape us to fit in, and yet we are warned, "Do not be conformed to this world." The Christian, one who is a Christian, knows the value of this world. Or maybe I should say, the Christian knows that this world is not of any ultimate value.

Jesus says in Luke chapter 9 in verse 25, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Paul says in 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 7, We brought nothing in; we can take nothing out. The Christian knows that. He understands that there is no eternal value whatsoever in the things of this world.

The Christian rejects the wisdom of this world. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 20. Paul says, We preach not the wisdom of this world, but "we preach Christ crucified." He does not use the speech of this world. 1 John chapter 4 in verse 5...John talks about people who do use the speech of this world. Everything about a Christian really ought to distinguish him from the world in which he lives, and yet I'm afraid so often we want to speak like the world, dress like the world. We want to, as it were, almost be people who couldn't possibly be recognized as being anything other than people who belong to the world, unless we find somebody that we think wouldn't be very threatening to us, and then we might tell them that we really are trying to be Christians.

A Christian, further, in relationship to the world, should be the light of the world. Remember that this world is darkness. Jesus told us—Matthew chapter 5 in verse 14—that we indeed are the light of the world, we as His disciples. Matthew chapter 5, verse 14: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." And He says in verse 16, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

As suggested earlier, I think this is the reason we're left in the world is precisely that the world might not be left in total darkness, but that we might be a light.

How is it that we as Christians can be a light to the world? We can be a light by living by a higher standard. In Philippians chapter 2, and verses 14 through 16, Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, verses 14 and 16, he says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world."

When Jesus told us to love our enemies, He's telling us to be a light in the world, to live by a higher standard, a standard that the world might recognize, but not live up to. We can be a light to the world in our purity. In 1 Peter chapter 2, 1 Peter the second chapter and particularly in verses 11 and 12, Peter tells us, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers"—and notice that: We don't really belong here—"I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation."

By our purity, by our compassion, by our love for one another, even by our keeping rules which the world establishes, but does not live up to. We are admonished as Christians to be subject to the laws of men, to the governments and the laws that they've established. Servants are admonished to be subject to their masters. Things that everybody says, "Yeah, you should do, but..." and the world will not even live up to its own standards.

But above all, we are to be a light of the world by our presentation of the Gospel. As the passage in Philippians chapter 2 and verse 16 said, "holding forth the word of truth" as lights in the world by our proclamation of the Gospel to the world.

While we are a light of this world, I would suggest at the same time, that we are supposed to be looking for a new world. We sing a song sometimes: This World is Not My Home. The passage we looked at in Peter talked about being strangers and pilgrims in this world.

Think about what it means to be a light in the world. If you were in a dark cave and you had a flashlight, what good would it be if you just hold the flashlight up and say, "Okay, I've got light here. Everybody look at the light. I've got light." Unless you use that to show people a way out of the darkness, a way to the light, it doesn't do any good. And so it is that we need to be unashamed to say to people that this world is not our home, that we are indeed looking for a new world, that our ultimate goal is not to just preserve the things or make things better in this life, but our goal is a recognition that all things in this world are subject to corruption and death. This world is passing away. It will ultimately be destroyed, and we look for the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, 2 Peter chapter 3.

But I would also suggest that, in that, we face a struggle, and a Christian is not only a light of the world, looking for a new world, but Christians are described as overcomers of the world. In 1 John chapter 5 and verses 4 and 5, it says, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

It's a great tragedy that most of us at most times don't even see the world as our enemy. We don't even see the world as something to be overcome, but that's because we don't see the temptations for what they really are. We don't see that molding power of the world; we don't see the end of the thing; we don't see the corruption and death, the fear, and the bondage, but ultimately, Paul said on another occasion, "All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." John said in 1 John chapter 3 and verse 1 that the world does not know us and that we may even be hated by the world even as Jesus was hated by the world. And the Christian is the one who has overcome the world, who has overcome the persecution, the mockery, the ridicule, the temptations, the corruption, and all of those things.

But how is that so? In ourselves, we as Christians have no power to overcome the world. In ourselves we have no light to enlighten the world. We have none of those things. We have them only in Christ. In John 16 in verse 33, Jesus says, "I have overcome the world." In 2 Corinthians chapter 5 in verse 17, we're told that, "if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature, and the old things have become new."

In John 8 verse 12, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." And so as Christ was in the world, but not of the world, the light of the world, the One Who had overcome the world, it is only by being in Him that we are in these things. Otherwise, we are still in the world. We are still, as Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 2 said, we are still in our trespasses and sin, dead in our trespasses and sin. We may not feel dead. We may be surrounded by a world who says that everything is beautiful and everything is wonderful and that we are a great success, but in terms of eternity, we're dead in trespasses...in terms of what really matters, we're dead in our sins and trespasses, unless we are in Christ.

So what is a Christian? A Christian is one who has overcome the world through Christ by being in Christ who has overcome the world. Being in Christ is a matter of obedience to Him. It's a matter of confessing Him as our Lord, and repenting of our sins, being baptized, that through baptism we might put on Christ.

In Galatians chapter 3, Paul talks there about the very process of becoming a Christian and how it involves putting on Christ and being in Christ. He says in Galatians chapter 3 and verse 27—I'll begin in verse 26—he says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who are baptized into Christ"—into Christ, Who has overcome the world; into Christ, Who is the light of the world; into Christ, Who is in the world, but not of the world—he says, "For all of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free man, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then are you Abraham's offspring, and heirs according to promise."

Just as Abraham was looking for a new world, he was a stranger and pilgrim, looking for a city that had foundations whose builder and maker is God, not any city of this world, but the heavenly Jerusalem, so also are we in Christ Jesus.

If there's anyone this morning who is still in this world, not only physically, but also spiritually, and needs to be brought out of the world to escape the corruption that is in this world through sin, through death, then we're going to stand and sing the invitation song to encourage you that you might take the opportunity to leave the world and look for that new world, and if you're subject to the invitation, we extend it now, as we stand and sing.