

Spiritual Warfare: The Christian Versus The World

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1983 (Rev. 86,89,92,95,05)

Introduction: There is a "spiritual warfare" going on around and within the Christian's life. We learned this from last week's lesson. We discussed that there were three enemies to the Christian (1.) the world, (2.) the flesh, (3.) and the devil. Many Christians struggle with this concept. Dick Denny writes, "I was taught during my first years in church that Christians have three enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil. I have a simpler view that is based on the laws of combat. I believe that an enemy is anyone, or anything, that keeps us from doing God's will. It just so happens that nearly all of our enemies fall into one of those three categories." ¹

Concerning the "world," I have heard both pastors in churches and professors in colleges say that the "world" is not much of a threat to the believer in Christ. They state that the "world" is only a vehicle to fulfill one's desires. The fact that the "world" is a vehicle used to attract and allure us is true. Lewis Sperry Chafer states, "The whole scope and character of the world-system directed, as it is, by its god, Satan, and offering its attractions and allurements, is faithfully and extensively portrayed in the New Testament." ²

Though the "world" is a vehicle through which one's flesh can fulfill its desires, it is much more than this. Two other factors are worth noting: (1.) sinful humans who make up the world, have contributed to the world's system in such a way that the "world" has taken a hostile position against the things of Christ and has built this concept into everything it does, (Col. 2:8); and (2.) Satan controls the "world" system using it to work against God's people and the things of God, (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-3). "Believers are warned not to love the world nor the things in the world (1 John 2:15). This statement indicates there is both a material element as well as philosophy to be shunned." ³

The threat of "worldliness" to the church is extremely great and extremely real. Chuck Swindoll and Roy Zuck writes, "Are churches taking their directions from the living God or from the fading fads of modernity? More churches seem to be leaning more toward popular culture than toward the timeless Word and the powerful Spirit to empower the church. ...Unfortunately worldliness is very much alive and well in our churches. The devaluation of the church as a shaper of culture proceeds unabated. ...In an attempt to be contemporary, many churches have a look-alike church culture, little different from the cultural setting of our world. ...The decline of personal standards of holiness indicates that the church is engulfed by worldliness." ⁴

There is a real battle for the Christian against the "world." This is why Jesus prayed the following things:

- (1.) that those who believe in Jesus would be protected by the Father from the "world" because the "world" threatens the unity of the believers, (Jn. 17:11);
- (2.) that the "world" seeks to take believers away from the Father's name, (Jn. 17:12);
- (3.) the world can't give us true joy, there is joy only within the believer's life through the words of Jesus, (Jn. 17:13);
- (4.) believer's in Jesus are not of the "world" therefore the world will hate them, (Jn. 17:14);
- (5.) that Satan uses the "world" to attack the believer's in Jesus, (Jn. 17:15); and
- (6.) the believer in Jesus was sent into the "world" with the truth of Jesus, (Jn. 17:18).

1. THE DEFINITION OF THE TERM WORLD

What does the word "world" mean? In the New Testament there are three Greek words that are translated "world:" (1.) "world" (Gr. "kosmos" meaning "an orderly system"); (2.) "world" (Gr. "aion" meaning the world in terms of time") where we get our English word "aeon;" and (3.) "world" (Gr. "oikoumene" meaning "the inhabited world") where we get our English term "ecumenical."⁵ The primary word for "world" (Gr. "kosmos") appears approximately 185 times.⁶ The "world" is not a living entity as such. The word "world" refers to the "order, disposition, and arrangement of things in light of humanity's thoughts and humanity's relationship to it."

A. "Adornment," (1 Pt. 3:3; Mat. 25:7; 12:44; Tit. 2:10, from which we get our English word, "cosmetic").

B. "Sum of creation or the universe," (Acts 17:24).

C. "Of the earth," (Tit. 2:12).

D. "Sphere of human life," (Mat. 4:8; 2 Cor. 1:12).

E. "People, mankind, or humanity," (Jn. 3:16,19; 2 Cor. 5:19; Rom. 5:12).

F. "Time period," (1 Cor. 3:19; 5:10; Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4).

G. "Material things, possessions," (Mat. 16:26).

H. "A system characterized, by alienation from God, by opposition to God, and by removing of God from its day-to-day life," (Jn. 7:7; 8:23; 17:14; 1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 4:3; 6:4; Ja. 1:27; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; 4:5; 5:19).

"As I struggled with how to define what the Bible calls 'the world,' I came to the conclusion that the philosophies of our world form an evil system that opposes God. They do not value the same things God does. They do not lead us in submission to Him, and anything that is not of God's will, plan, and purpose is evil. Whether these philosophies are perpetuated by governments, business, entertainment or economic systems, they represent 'the world.' Many people use them as guidelines for their lives, but worldly philosophies cannot save us for eternal life. They only make our lifelong journey more dangerous and difficult."⁷

"The 'world' is a vast order or system that Satan has promoted which conforms to his ideals, aims, and methods. It is civilization now functioning apart from God, a civilization in which none of its promoters really expect God to share; who assign to God no consideration in respect to their projects, nor do they ascribe any causality to Him. This system embraces its godless governments, conflicts, armaments, jealousies; it's education, culture, religions or morality, and pride. It is the sphere in which man lives. It is what he sees, what he employs. To the uncounted multitude it is all they ever know so long as they live in this earth."⁸

"In the sense of the present world system, the ethically bad sense of the world refers to the order or arrangement under which Satan has organized the world of unbelieving mankind upon his

cosmic principles of force, greed, selfishness, ambition, and pleasure. ...Satan will use the world to advance his purpose which is to be like God and receive adoration and worship."⁹

"The world (Gr. 'kosmos') denotes that which is hostile to God, lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything divine, ruined and depraved."¹⁰

"There must be three facets to any definition of the word 'world:' (1.) the idea of an ordered system, (2.) the relationship of Satan to it, and (3.) the concept of its hostility to God.... Here is a suggested definition: the cosmos world is that system organized by Satan, headed by Satan, and run by Satan, which leaves God out and is a rival to Him."¹¹

2. THE DURATION OF THE WORLD

"The world is transitory, temporary, and under divine judgment, (1 Jn. 2:17)."¹² It is slowly passing away. There are three phases or conditions in "time" of the world.

A. The world that "was," (2 Pt. 3:5-6).

It was destroyed by a flood.

B. The world that "is now" (2 Pt. 3:7).

This "age" will come to an end, (Mat. 13:39,40,49; 24:3; 28:20; Heb. 9:26).

C. The world that "is to come" (2 Pt. 3:7,10,13).

"When the original world was created by God, it was created to be the instrument through which God would manifest His glory."¹³ The future world to come will again finally realize this original intended purpose.

3. THE DISTINCTION OF THE WORLD

Christians should not be unaware of what the "world" really is.

A. Satan does have authority over the world system, (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

B. Satan is in control of this "world," (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2).

C. The whole world system is said to be resting in Satan, (1 Jn. 5:19).

D. There is a spiritual darkness to this world in which Christ came as a light, (Jn. 12:46).

E. The world is "ignorant" of the Father in heaven, (Jn. 17:25).

F. The world is "ignorant" of God's wisdom, (1 Cor. 2:1; 1:21).

4. THE DIAGNOSIS OF THE WORLD

A. The world is permeated with sin, (Rom. 5:12).

B. The world is now guilty before God, (Rom. 3:19).

C. The world needs to be "reproved" which is one of the Holy Spirit's ministries, (Jn 16:8).

D. The world is hostile to God's people, (Jn. 16:33; 15:18,19).

5. THE DEFILEMENT OF THIS WORLD

A. The world is filled with "evil," (Ja. 1:27; 4:4; 2 Pt. 1:4; 2:20; 1 Jn. 5:4).

B. The world is filled with "evil works," (Jn. 7:7).

C. The world is filled with "corruption through lust," (2 Pt. 1:4).

- D. The world is filled with "defilement," (2 Pt. 2:20).
- E. The world is filled with "fornicators," (1 Cor. 5:10).
- F. The world is filled with "spiritual pollutions," (2 Pt. 2:20).

6. THE DAMNATION OF THE WORLD

"Because the world has been usurped by Satan through deception, people lie under God's condemnation and will ultimately be judged. ...When God's time of judgment comes, believers will judge the world, (1 Cor. 6:2)."¹⁴

- A. The world is under condemnation, (1 Cor. 11:32).
- B. The world is going to be judged, (Ps. 9:8; 98:9; Jn. 12:31; Acts 17:31).
- C. The world is under "guilt" (Jn. 16:8,11).

7. THE DANGER OF THE WORLD FOR THE BELIEVER

It is so easy for the Christian to adopt the world's practices because he is involved so totally within the world's system every day. This is called "worldliness" and this term is not popular today.

- A. The world wants the Christian to "conform" to its system, (Rom. 12:1-2).
- B. The world invites the Christian to be "friends" with its system (Ja. 4:1-4).
- C. The world makes itself "attractive" to the Christian, (1 Jn. 2:13-15).

The world lures the Christian to sin. The world solicits us to satisfy our physical and aesthetic desires in unholy ways. John stated all that is in the world: (1.) the lust of the flesh; (2.) the lust of the eyes; (3.) pride of life.

"The world tempts Christians to reduce their love for the Father. Temptations from the world come through (1.) the lust of the flesh; (2.) the lust of the eyes; (3.) the boastful pride of life (1 Jn. 2:16). The world relentlessly tells us, 'obey your thirst. Satisfy your hunger. Fulfill your sexual desires.' These legitimate desires can be properly fulfilled in the father's time and way. But the world implores us, 'love yourself and not the Father.' Gratify your desires now in your own way. Satan and our fleshly lusts intensify our urge to yield to the world's temptations. The pull of the world is strong, but we can say no to the world by applying the word and relying on the Spirit."¹⁵

"Worldliness is a person's self-centered attitude of love for the evil world system and earthly things rather than for God and heavenly things. Christians can pretend to avoid worldliness by not living like the world in their outward conduct and yet still love the world and the things of the world in their innermost character. Jesus called this practice hypocritical because it looks like righteous conduct but is inwardly sinful (Matt. 23:28). Worldliness is basically a character issue. Christians tend to be worldly to the extent that worldly values influence their character. Therefore to overcome the world Christians must build their character with Biblical values and virtues and not with the world's values."¹⁶

"It would take too much space here to list the many ways in which Christians have been weakened, but above all else it has been by becoming eclectic (which is simply another way of saying 'worldly minded'). Perhaps this eclecticism can be seen most clearly in counseling (which has been taken captive by psychological theory), in church administration (where worldly

business principles and practices have been adopted wholesale), and in missionary and church growth strategies (in which sociological demographic approaches prevail). These areas are as obvious as any, but discerning Christians will see that a mixture of Christian and worldly thinking pervades the church at all levels, from education of our children to the building of our families."¹⁷

8. THE DEFENSE AGAINST THE WORLD

"The weapons of the world are learning, personal influence, impressive credentials, rhetorical polish, and the like. These things Paul had discounted and discarded, (Phil. 3:4-8). He did not wage war as the world does or use their weapons. The weapons Paul used were the proclaimed Word of God and prayer, (Eph. 6:17-18). In dependence on God (1 Cor. 2:4-5) these weapons, frail by worldly standards, are able to demolish the arguments and every pretension of the gospel's foes. ...The object of Paul's warfare was to make people obedient."¹⁸ The primary defense Christians have is God's Word. "The Christian's method in his warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil is also specific revelation."¹⁹

- A. Christians are to live life through Christ who was begotten into this world, (1 John 4:9).
- B. Christians are to reveal Christ to the lost world, (Jn. 3:16).
- C. Christians are to realize that all that is in the world is not of the Father, (1 Jn. 2:15-16).
- D. Christians are not to love the world nor the things in the world, (1 Jn. 2:15)
- E. Christians are not to become friends with the world, (Ja. 4:4).
- F. Christians are to keep unspotted from the world, (Ja. 1:27; 1 Pt. 1:19).
- G. Christians are to use the things in the world, but not abuse them, (1 Cor. 7:29-31).
- H. Christians are not to have "worldly" passions, (Tit. 2:12).
- I. Christians are not to be "conformed" to this "world," (Rom. 12:2).
- J. Christians are to be lights unto the world, (Phil. 2:15).
- K. Christians are to live "in" the world, but not be "of" the world, (Jn. 17:11,14,16).
- L Christians are to minister "unto" the world, (Jn. 17:18).
- M. Christians are to use faith to over come the world, (1 Jn. 5:4-5).
- N. Christians are not to love this world, (1 Jn. 2:15).

9. THE DELIVERANCE FROM THE WORLD

"One of the glorious truths of the gospel is that the death of Christ has changed the believer's relationship to the world,"²⁰ God's people are not of this world.

- A. Believers are citizens of heaven, (Phil. 3:20).
- B. Believers are not of this world, (Jn. 17:6,11; 15:19).
- C. Believers are not of this world just as Christ was not of this world, (Jn. 17:14,16).
- D. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, (Jn. 18:35).
- E. All that is in the world is not of the Father, (1 Jn. 2:16).
- F. The rudiments of the world are not after Christ, (Col. 2:8).

Conclusion: Christians have escaped the corruption that is in the "world," (2 Pt. 1:4). Christians have been crucified unto the "world," (Gal. 6:14). The Christian is to use the world, but live above the world, (1 Cor. 7:31). The Christian is to enjoy the world, but not love the world, (1 Tim. 6:17; 1 Jn. 2:15).

The Christian can receive great comfort concerning their journey in the world from reading Jesus' prayer (Jn. 17). There are seven facts you will learn:

1. Jesus existed before the world because He originally created the world, (Jn 17:4-5,24);
2. Jesus received you "out of" the world, (Jn. 17:6,14,16);
3. Jesus intercedes for you while you are in the world, (Jn. 17:9);
4. Jesus wants to protect you while you are in the world, (Jn. 17:11,12);
5. Jesus knows the world is not your friend, so He is our friend, (Jn. 17:14,25);
6. Jesus wants us to have joy in this world even if the world is an evil place, (Jn. 17:13); and;
7. Jesus entrusted you with the mission of delivering His Word to the world, (Jn. 17:18-21,26).

End Notes:

¹Spiritual Warfare, by Dick Denny, Grand Rapids: chosen, 2004, p. 20.

²"Anthropology," Lewis Sperry Chafer, Bibliotheca Sacra, July 1934, Vol. 91, p. 267.

³The Moody Handbook of Theology, Paul Enns, Chicago: Moody, 1989, p. 313.

⁴Understanding Christian Theology, Charles Swindoll and Roy Zuck, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003, p. 1141.

⁵The Theological Wordbook, Charles Swindoll and Roy Zuck, Waco: Word, 2000, p. 389.

⁶Basic Theology, Charles Ryrie, Wheaton: Victor, 1986, p. 151.

⁷Spiritual Warfare, by Dick Denny, Grand Rapids: chosen, 2004, p. 20.

⁸"Angelology," Lewis Sperry Chafer, Bibliotheca Sacra, July 1947, Vol. 99, p. 283.

⁹"New Testament Doctrine of Satan," William Bellshaw, Grace Journal, Vo. 9, fall 1968, p. 35.

¹⁰The Moody Handbook of Theology, Paul Enns, Chicago: Moody, 1989, p. 313.

¹¹Basic Theology, Charles Ryrie, Wheaton: Victor, 1986, p. 151.

¹²Designed to Be Like Him, J. Dwight Penetcost, Chicago: Moody, 1977, p. 201.

¹³Designed to Be Like Him, J. Dwight Penetcost, Chicago: Moody, 1977, p. 201.

¹⁴The Theological Wordbook, Charles Swindoll and Roy Zuck, Waco: Word, 2000, p. 390.

¹⁵Understanding Christian Theology, Charles Swindoll and Roy Zuck, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003, p. 981.

¹⁶Understanding Christian Theology, Charles Swindoll and Roy Zuck, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003, p. 980.

¹⁷The War Within, Jay Adams, Eugene: Harvest House, 1989, p. 35

¹⁸The Bible Knowledge Commentary: The New Testament, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, Ed., Wheaton: Victor, 1993, p. 576.

¹⁹"Anthropology," Lewis Sperry Chafer, Bibliotheca Sacra, July 1934, Vol. 91, p. 267.

²⁰Designed to Be Like Him, J. Dwight Penetcost, Chicago: Moody, 1977, p. 201.