

WHAT THE WORLD IS AND HOW A CHRISTIAN CAN LIVE IN IT

“Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” 1 John 2. 15.

“Know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God ? Whoever therefore is minded to be the friend of the world, is constituted enemy of God.” James 4. 4.

To the serious and thoughtful, the question comes up often and earnestly—What is the world? What is it from which we are to keep ourselves unspotted? There are three senses in which the word ‘world’ can be used; literally, it means the order or system according to which human affairs are managed on the earth. The earth itself is called the world, because it is the platform on which the world-system operates, and the people who live according to this world-system are called the world also. They may thus be distinguished: the world-space, the world-people, the world-system. When we read that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, it may be understood that He came into the world-space, and in so doing He necessarily came into contact with the world-system, which hated Him. He said of His disciples, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world,” that is, you are not under the system governed by it, finding your life in it. He that is a friend to that system is an enemy to God, because it is self-governed, not subject to God. Take for an illustration, the military system. When a man enlists in the army he finds everything provided for him: the paymaster’s department supplies his funds, the quartermaster’s department clothes him, the ordnance department arms and equips him. It is arranged for him that he shall go here, and lodge there; there are regular hours for drill, dress, parade, roll-call, &c., &c., and to this system he is bound when he enters the army. It is very significantly called a little world in itself, so complete and systematic are its arrangements. This is but a faint illustration of the all-governing system called the world, where every want of man is provided for—every faculty brought into exercise.

Man wants society; the world provides the social system; this is a perfect study in itself. Position is everything, it is sought for at great trouble, and no expense is too great to secure it.

Behold the great ladder, 'Society,' with its countless myriads; some striving to climb higher and higher, others to hold creditably their present position. What a tremendous power to absorb heart and mind the social system possesses! Again, man wants political government, protection of life, property, rights; this necessity the world-system fully meets. And what a complete arrangement there is for what we call business. The working system of the world is perfectly amazing. Men of mere muscle find work; inventive minds have full scope for their 'genius;' artistic souls revel in their world of sculpture, painting, music, poetry; students sit and study problems; writers write books; the very lusts and luxury of some furnish means of livelihood to others. It takes all kinds to make a world, men say.

Man is a very complicated creature. A good many different things taken together are needed for most; a little business, a little politics, a little society, a little study, and a little religion. Man is naturally religious. The word religion which we use so much, only occurs five times in the whole Bible. Religion is not godliness, for worshippers of idols are religious. Religion is as much a part of a man's nature as his intellect or memory; being therefore so important a part of the man-nature, the world-system has a special provision for its necessities, complete in every part. One is very sensitive to tender impressions—has a love for the beautiful; fine music, imposing ceremonies, and religious rites are provided for such an one. Another is free and out-spoken in his nature; he must have opportunity to give vent to his feelings unrestrained. Another is cold, reserved, reasoning; a stern orthodoxy just suits him. One of a conscientious, self-depreciating disposition, must do penance in some shape or other, and his requirements are also met and provided for, and so on. There are creeds and doctrines and sects for every variety of temperament, for every shade of the fleshly religious feeling.

Could any system be more admirable and complete? Nothing left out. Enough of joy and satisfaction to keep this great moving mass of humanity thoroughly occupied, and measurably contented; their hearts are kept busy; their minds are kept busy; if one thing fails, another is provided; even death and bereavement are not left out of the calculation, for the world-system

has its arrangement of funerals, mourning attire, visits and notes of sympathy, and all the varied accessories; and so the world is able to tide over sorrows before long, and occupy itself just as before. Now God is leading some, a very few, to see that all this business, politics, education, governments, science, inventions, railroads, telegraphs, social arrangements, charitable institutions, reforms, religion and all, are of the world-system. And this system is becoming more and more perfect every day. 'The progress of the age' is only the worldly element developing itself. Whatever Christ's present relation to the world is, that is the Christian's too—the place which the Lord is in above, and the place that He is not in below, defines our place. Whence is all this?—Will it surprise anyone to hear that Satan is the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, and manager of this stupendous system? His is the energy, his the presiding genius, he is its prince. When Jesus Christ was on earth, the devil came and offered Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, for, said he, that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it, if thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. Here we have the curtain lifted, and the real object of all human religious worship exposed. Scripture describes him as "full of wisdom, perfect in beauty," arraying himself "like an angel of light." Who can wonder if unthinking men, yea, and the more thinking ones, are deceived and deluded? How few have their eyes opened to see, by the word of God, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, what the world really is. Some think they have escaped from the snare of worldliness, if they have given up the so-called worldly pleasures, and become members of churches, or religious associations, not discerning that they are just as much in the world-system as before, only Satan, its prince, has shifted them from one department to another, to quiet their uneasy consciences and make them better satisfied with themselves.

The question now arises, if these things are so, what is the remedy? How are those who are in the broad way, and living according to the world-system, to escape from its control? How shall we know what is of the world, and what is of God? The apostle says, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." The Christian's normal mode of life is being

governed by Christ, as a man's body by his head; where there is health, there is no motion of hand or foot except as the head says "move." In just this way Jesus Christ is the Christian's Head, and he is under His immediate direction in all things small and great. This is how Christianity cuts at the very root of worldliness, for man's free will is the foundation principle on which the world-system is constructed, just as the principle of the Christian life is dependence on God and obedience to His will. Satan's great aim is to get up a system for man which will be a perfect substitute for God's Spirit-leading; this will be his final masterpiece, and this is the prominent feature of the great apostasy fast approaching; Satan openly, and in his own person, will declare himself to be god of this world; a full revelation of what is now hidden in mystery. Is it not high time then for Christians to awake out of sleep, and to see to it that they are not in any way associated with a system so fast ripening for judgment? But you say, how can we help it? Are we not bound by necessity to these things by our trades and professions, as members of government and society? 'Business must be attended to.' Yes, this is a necessity that everybody admits; but mark, the very fact that everybody admits it, stamps it as not of God.

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Faith does not look at outward circumstances, at what is possible or not possible; faith disregards what seems, and looks at God. People all about, on every hand, will tell us what it is necessary to do, and not to do, here among men, for what suits man is their standard and measure; but the child of God walks right along, paying no attention to what they say, for what suits God is His standard and measure. They have the way all marked out as plain as can be, and perfectly reasonable and satisfactory, but that is nothing to one who walks by faith; he knows that whatever is universally agreed on as the right way must be wrong (Luke 16. 15), that is the broad way.

For instance: everybody says that a citizen of the country, a Christian, should be interested in the government of the country to which he belongs, and ought to vote, so as to help to put good men in power. God says differently; in many places and ways He tells me that, as His child, I am not a citizen of any country, or a member of any society: my citizenship is in

heaven, and I have henceforth to do with heavenly things; the cross of Christ has crucified me to the world, and the world to me; if I give my mind and heart to these earthly things I shall be the enemy of the cross of Christ. Be not conformed to the world. What then shall we do with governments? Why, submit to them, since God orders them; and when they impose tax, pay; and make supplication to God for kings, and all in authority. All therefore that a Christian has to do with politics is to be subject to the powers set over him, not only for wrath but for conscience sake. It is true that in Christ he is heir of "all things," including the earth in which the world-system has now its operation, yet (as to Abraham in the land of Canaan) God gives him not so much as to set his foot on for a present inheritance, "The just shall live by faith." If, then, the true child of God refuses to vote, it is not so much that he thinks voting in itself wrong, as that he has given his vote and interest to the Man in heaven, whom God has exalted as King of kings, and Lord of lords. He has, beyond it all, lost his interest in these things, by virtue of something he has found which is far more attractive. He sees, too, that the world in spirit and essence is ungodly, that its boasted reforms and improvement are all tending to shut out God from the heart of man. He desires to stand as a witness for the truth, and for God, and of the coming judgment, at the appearing of Christ, when men are congratulating themselves on peace and safety. He desires that by these means others may learn through him to escape the snare by which Satan is entrapping the mass of mankind.

We who are saved are to be distinct, as taking side with a rejected Christ, against the world which has crucified Him; and marked as men of a heavenly race, blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom shine ye as lights in the world. This is the great mission of God's children. But to live in this way costs something. It is to be like a single rock in a rapid river. Everything round it is on the move, all tending strongly one way; there is constant pressure, pressure, pressure, but there it stands amid an endless opposition, which would surely sweep it away, if it were not Rock. When we learn to take the words of God and practise them, and bear testimony to them in our

lives, then the storm comes. To belong to a so-called church is easy enough, and to do as others do—to be an honest man and a good citizen brings no persecution, one may be all that and yet go with the current; but to shine as lights in the world for God, provokes the world's enmity; wherever Christ is seen, just so far is He hated; if He is seen in me I am hated on that account, but if I enjoy a fair reputation, if no one has anything against me as a Christian, what then? If the life of Jesus is not made manifest in my mortal body, Christ is not discoverable in me.

The matter stands thus. When once a person has really come to know God, or rather to be known of Him, he is drawn upward, by union with Christ on high, from participation in the things of the world-system, and it is a fitting question, how can he turn again to the weak and beggarly elements? Now he has become a son of God, and has life, eternal life, in Christ, and is one with the Head revealed to him through the word, by the Spirit, how can such an one who has come to know God, be interested in the world? Should we see a boy eating bitter, worthless fruit in an orchard, while on the very next tree there were delicious apples, we should judge that he did not know of the good apples. So likewise if a man is heartily engaged in any of the things that make up the man system, can he, we ask, can he know God? And this is why the words of God come not as definite orders: thou shalt not vote, thou shalt not be honoured in this evil age, thou shalt suffer shame. No, but they are just in such a way that the loving disciple, whose selfish heart is broken, and who only wants to know the mind of the Lord, may find out the secret, by being more with Christ, in order to be more like Him, and transformed from this present evil world; not like the old commands in the Levitical law—thou shalt, and thou shalt not—yet plainly there, and easily discerned if the eye is single. This is a wonderful provision, that the heart of love finds no difficulty in discovering the will of God, while the heart that is not sincere can do nothing else than find excuses and invent ways of passing by a distasteful path. A good illustration of this may be found in a family: here is a loving, dutiful son, who learns the ways and mind of his father, and all is very easy and natural for him; but another son, left in the same way, takes ever so many advantages, he knows, or might know; but since he

cares only to please himself, he can say, I did not know, you never said I should not do so and so, or that I should not go to this place.

To conclude. You must needs be in contact with the world-system to some degree, but this contact is never to be one of fellowship; what concord can there be between Christ and Belial? “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” Jesus, who was not of this world, suffered and was straitened; the loneliness and tribulation were real to Him, and they will be real to us just as we follow in His steps. Are not too many of us taking a comfort and satisfaction, and enjoying a home feeling that is entirely unwarranted under this godless world-system? Home here, where Christ is not? We are homeless wanderers and weary pilgrims, yea foreigners, if we be Christ’s. Contact with the world there must be, while we are in it, but are we not brought into contact at many points where there ought to be no contact at all, and would be none if we were bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus? Many are the deceptions wherewith the enemy allures the heart, even of God’s children: religious meetings, service, Christian fellowship, in all of which the flesh can participate, are substituted for living by faith in the Son of God. The godly of old, whose report has come down to us that they pleased God, were despised; the offscouring of all things, even unto this day, having their conversation in the heavens. In contrast with them we are honourable. We live too much according to the world-system to be brought into conflict with it, and the result is we are disloyal as subjects of Christ, and we escape the cross and its reproach. The word stands unalterable. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” There is a narrow way; may we be of the few who find it. We carry our passports with us. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit, and are only waiting for the shout to be caught up into the air, to meet our Lord and be for ever with Him—What a blessed hope!

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