

BRINGING IN THE NEW YEAR RIGHT BY KNOWING OUR ENEMY

Lesson 3 – The World

Intro: Over the last two weeks, we have studied what the Bible teaches about the Devil and our own sinful nature. Surely we have seen that these are formidable foes indeed! But we would be amiss if we were to think that they were the only source of opposition that we face as believers. The truth is that our world-flesh-devil enemy has another facet as well. The believer must contend with the world. But before we can engage in the battle with this enemy, we must understand him. We must study him, and learn his tactics. And then, we must fight.

I. **DEFINING “THE WORLD”**

We can mean a lot of different things when we speak of “the world.” Since three different words in the New Testament are translated “world,” and their diverse meanings often overlap, we will simply categorize these meanings topically. When you read the Bible and come across the word “world,” ask yourself - Is “the world” referred to in this passage a *Who*, a *What*, a *When*, or a *Where*? These distinctions aren’t perfect, but I think they help.

A. The world as a Who

This is a reference to all of unbelieving humanity. Unbelieving humanity is inherently sinful. But Christ died for them, God loves them, and has chosen us out of them (John 15:19). Thus we should love them and evangelize them (Mark 16:15).

B. The world as a What

This is a reference to the evil force that opposes God. “... [The world in this sense] designates a virtual spiritual force, the antitheses, as it were, of the kingdom of God. It is the very embodiment of evil...It is a pervasive entity that exist quite apart from particular evil individuals...It is a mindset and frame of reference totally different from and opposed to that of Christ and his disciples.” (Millard Erickson)

This force is not the same as the lost individuals who are a part of it. We are not to love it, do not have the same nature as it (John 15:19), and are hated and opposed by it (John 15:18).

C. The world as a When

This is a reference to the present evil age, or the “end times.” This prophetic time period actually began in the time of Christ and will continue until the rapture. It is characterized by sin and apostasy and controlled by the Devil (2 Cor. 4:4). We are not to be conformed to it (Rom. 12:1-2) or to love it, for we have been saved from it.

D. The world as a Where

This is a reference to the physical universe or the earth. Now marred by sin, God created it, called it good, and entered it in the person of Jesus Christ (I Tim. 1:15).

E. Clearing it all up

Perhaps we can clear the fog if we remember that Christ came into the where-world, inaugurated the when-world, was opposed by the what-world all in order that he might die for the who-world.

II. **MYTH-BUSTING THE WORLD**

As we saw with the flesh, confusing the different definitions of “the world” can lead to confusion and bad theology. Blur the distinctions between them, and you get some bad ideas. It is especially important that we not confuse the Who-world with the What-world. Confusing the two can cause us to violate scripture.

A. Blurring the distinction neglects the Great Commandment. – Matt 22:37-40

As we have seen, the phrase “the world” sometimes refers to people, and sometimes refers to a system of evil not equated with individuals. Confusing the two is a mistake. Remember that the second greatest commandment is to love people, but we are commanded *not* to love the system of evil. Confusing the two violates the second great commandment.

B. Blurring the distinction reverses the Great Commission. – Matt. 28:18-20

If we're not careful, we can become afraid to interact with lost people because we don't want to become "worldly." This isolationism can make us retreat in fear from sinners. We must remember that people are not the enemy – they are the mission field. We go into people groups to fulfill the Great Commission, not away from them to protect our purity. The who-world is not the enemy, the what-world is. Confusing the two violates the Great Commission.

C. Blurring the distinction could supplant Scripture with tradition. – Matt. 15:1-9

I once heard a preacher say, *"Our girls wear skirts because the world doesn't. We have to be different from the world. If the world started wearing skirts, we would have to come up with a different way to dress our girls, in order to stay different."* Yes, we are to be different from the lost world, but this difference is due to the inherent immorality of the what-world. Women are to dress modestly because modesty is a moral issue. Holiness is not a matter of simple opposites, but of moral distinctions. Lost people breathe air; should we hold our breath? Lost people drive cars; should we walk everywhere? Lost people eat food; should we fast until we die? If lost women start dressing modestly, do we up the ante and make our girls wear Eskimo suits so they look different? That is all nonsense. We become light and salt to the world not by mechanically reversing everything lost people do, but by following God's standards of morality as revealed in the Bible. Confusing the who-world and what-world can turn the traditions of men into the commandments of God.

D. Clearing the Fog

Our enemy is the when-world and the what-world. When you think of the world as our enemy, remember that the world is under the control of the devil (2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:31), is the enemy of God and the Christian (John 15:18-25; James 4:4), and has been overcome by Christ (John 16:33) and every Christian (I John 5:4).

III. BATTLE STRATEGY FOR WINNING THE WAR AGAINST THE WORLDS

A. Rom 12:1-2 – Resist the when-world's immorality by renewing your mind with Scripture.

Satan rules this present age and has tainted it with sin. Sin is literally the word of the day. It dominates this entire age. It forces all who live in this time into the same image of sinfulness. As one man said years ago, it seeks to "squeeze" us "into its mold." Yet as Christians, we must resist this sinful pull. Paul spells out the incredible mercy that God has shown to humanity in Rom. 1-11, and then reveals that this mercy demands of us a life totally consecrated to Him and His will.

- i. *Rom. 12:1 – God's many gracious acts toward us demand our one grateful act towards him.*
Since God has graciously created us, and mercifully redeemed us, it is only fitting that we submit fully to his control. This life of total consecration to God our savior is an act of rightful worship to him as Lord. Paul spells out in chapters 12-14 the specifics of what this devotion looks like.
- ii. *Rom. 12:2 – God re-creates us into his image by renewing our minds with his word.*
While God created us in his image, that image was marred by the fall. What we call "sanctification" is God's act of re-creating his holy image in us. This change must begin with the way we think. As we think, so we live. God doesn't change our behavior directly, as though we were robots who simply needed to be put on a different setting. Rather, he changes our hearts, that is how we think, and this in turn controls our actions. As we battle the influence of this age, we must let how we think be shaped by God, not the world.

B. I John 2:15-17 – Resist the what-world's allure by seeing its temporal, anti-Christian nature.

- i. 2:15 – Loving the world is incompatible with loving God.
- ii. 2:16 – The World and God have opposite origins and natures.
- iii. 2:17 – There is a temporal allure to the world, but no eternal future.

Conclusion: Amazingfacts.com reveals that the battle of New Orleans was one of the most famous of the war of 1812. During this battle, General Andrew Jackson and his troops defeated a larger British army, and lost only 71 men, while the British lost around 2000. The thing that stands out most about this battle however is that it was a battle that was fought *after* the war was already won. The battle was fought on January 8, 1815. This was 15 days after a peace treaty between the United States and England had been signed in Europe. But the news, which came across the Atlantic Ocean on a ship, didn't reach Jackson or the British troops before the battle. The war ended in 1814, but this battle was fought in 1815. At the time of the battle, even President James Madison in Washington, D.C., didn't know about the treaty or the battle. The war was already over, but that truth had not yet set in across the nation.

As we have studied the enemy we face in the New Year – the world/flesh/devil, we have noticed a consistent theme common to each of them. *They are all defeated foes.* When Christ died on the Cross, he overcame the World, crucified our flesh, and defeated the power of the Devil. In a very real sense, the war is already over. Victory has already been declared. As the old preacher said, "I've skipped ahead to the back of the book – and we win!" However, the realities of our victory have not yet fully set in and taken effect. Thus, we must still do battle. But go into every battle knowing that the war is already over. Victory is already yours; you only have to claim it.