

In the World But Not Of the World

By David Sheats

Published by NTChurchSource.com

"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:16).

"Adulterers and adulteresses. Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

"And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (I John 2:17).

We can see from these scriptures that God makes a clear distinction between the world and what He is doing in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is a distinction that we must see clearly and maintain, if we are to be of any use to God. To try to bring about friendship where God has brought division is to make ourselves enemies of God and what He is doing. As we consider this area, let us ask God for that "eye salve" that only He can give, that we may see clearly and move in faith under His control.

Called Out of This World

When we talk about "the world," what do we mean? Probably most of us realize that we are not referring to rocks and trees and oceans. Consider these scriptures: *"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (I John 5:19). "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2). "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (I Corinthians 2:12).*

From these and other scriptures, I believe we can say that "the world" is the whole of mankind and the system which mankind has built, separate from God and outside of Christ. It is characterized by sin and lawlessness, and is under the influence of Satan. Throughout scripture, "the world" is constantly seen in opposition to God and what He is doing.

When Jesus came into the world, He made it very clear that He was not a part of this world. *"You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world" (John 8:23).* He said that He loved the world, and came to save the world. The world lies in death and sin, and one day will know the wrath of God. *"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10). "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth" (Revelation 16:1).*

Although God will one day in the future bring His wrath upon the whole world, He has already pronounced His judgment on the world for all to see. He did this at the cross of Christ. *"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31).* The apostle Paul said, *"But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).*...

We may think of the judgment as the verdict before the sentence is carried out. God's judgment on this world is final, however, and the wrath is sure to come. This is the time of mercy when those who desire

to be with God may choose Him and separate themselves from this world. The only hope for those who do not avail themselves of God's provision in Christ is the wrath of God. But God is long suffering, *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (II Peter 3:9).

The fact that the world has already been judged has tremendous implications. When a judgment has been issued, there is no further discussion. There is no more debate, and no more effort to change the situation. To try to change the world or to work within the system of the world is to try to work where God is not working. God is not trying to uphold a standard of righteousness in the world or its system. God is not trying to change the world system.

To try in our own efforts and our own wisdom to do something when God is not with us is futile. It is to be like Israel when God told them not to go across the Jordan into the Promised Land. If they had gone when God told them to, God would have been with them, and they would have succeeded. But when they tried to go on their own, they were completely defeated, and God was dishonored even by their attempts.

We must see something of the character of God in this matter. God always works from a place of victory. He does not struggle with one arm behind His back. Christ has won the victory, and the devil is a defeated foe! The verdict has been pronounced on his end and his whole domain. There is only one question before us: "Who will come out of this world into Christ?" Every man has a choice. If we do not choose Christ, then we choose this world. And if we choose this world, we choose to be under the influence and control of Satan. God does not force that choice. Based on that choice, however, the end is sure. Those who choose Christ will be with God forever. Those who do not choose Christ and His authority will be cast from His presence into eternal judgment and the wrath of God against all ungodliness.

From our point of view, it is hard to accept this "black and white" verdict. We tend to think that things cannot be that bad, and that surely the world can be made a better place in which to live if only we try. But will we be honest with God's verdict, or will we bring in our own wisdom? *"For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe"* (I Corinthians 1:19-21). Paul goes on to say that he preached *"Christ crucified,"* and that the answer lay in the message of the cross *"which is the power of God to salvation."*

What is the message of the cross? Part of the answer is that the world has been judged, crucified with Christ, and that every man should separate himself from the world and its system. When we speak in this way, some would interpret this view as not caring, and not being willing to stand against evil in this world. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Rather, we are saying that in standing against sin and the evil one, we must stand God's way, not in our own wisdom. The way to stand is to stand in Christ. We are not called to fight but to stand. Christ has won the victory! Our place is to separate ourselves from this world, and stand victorious in Christ. This is where God is working and this is where we are to be found. We are not disinterested bystanders, but victorious participants. We are standing in Christ--outside the camp, separated from this world, and bidding all who will hear to come out and separate themselves unto Him. There is nothing to fight about. The battle has been won at Calvary! Glory! What rest and peace this brings to our hearts. It is a place of strength and victory.

If we do not see what Christ did at Calvary, then we will be pulled down to Satan's level and continue to fight on his ground with his tactics as though the victory had never taken place at Calvary. If we do,

we will be defeated, because God is not in it and we are no match for Satan on his ground. He will always win, keeping us in turmoil and completely useless to God. But why would we fight a defeated foe? What is there to gain? Christ said, "It is finished." Do we know what was finished? May God open our eyes to see things from God's perspective, and then to move in His victory by faith. In that place we are *"more than conquerors through Him who loved us"* (Romans 8:37). In that place we have entered the rest of God and ceased from our labor as God did from His (Hebrews 4:10).

Citizens From Above

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). *"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God"* (Ephesians 2:19).

As far as God is concerned, there is no such thing as dual citizenship. There cannot be loyalty to both sides of a conflict, and there is conflict between Satan and God. There is no neutral ground, and we must choose our captain--to whom we will pledge allegiance. Since the heavenly kingdom has one King, and the earthly kingdom another, we cannot be loyal to both. We must choose.

If we try to maintain friendship with both rulers, and keep peace where there is no peace, we will find ourselves torn apart in the conflict. We will always be at odds. No man can serve two masters, and those who try don't please anybody. The only way we can please God is to separate ourselves from the kingdom of darkness and come under the rule of God.

If we try to live in both kingdoms, we will compromise. Compromise always brings weakness. God does not compromise, and He never asks us to compromise. God works from a place of absolute strength, with absolute standards of holiness and righteousness. The kingdom of this world is based on compromise, with the laws approximately representing the standards of the majority. The laws shift with the shifting standards of the people. What is not acceptable today becomes acceptable tomorrow. Worse than that, the religious system is only one step behind the world.

Because so many want to maintain a place of acceptance in the world, they find a way to justify a lower standard which is just a bit different from that of the world. In so doing, many feel they are promoting righteousness and standing on God's side. But the righteousness that is being promoted is only a certain standard of outward actions which has no meaning to God. That was what the Law of Moses was, but the Law was also put away at Calvary. The only righteousness that has any meaning is that which comes from the heart, and that is something that only God can do.

Many examples could be given, but the words of Jesus in Matthew are enough: *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart"* (Matthew 5:27,28). The righteousness that God brings into the heart by His presence has an outward expression, but expression put on the outside, whether in pretense or forced, has no value to God. On the contrary, it may actually be easier to deal with sin if it is open rather than hidden.

Our Place of Involvement

What are some of the practical expressions of what we have been considering? First of all, we must know that any allegiance or relationship with this world which causes us to compromise with the authority of God in our lives is wrong, and should be broken. If we do not break the relationship that is pulling at us, it will eventually pull us down, and may in the end cost us our own soul before God. There can be no divided authority in our lives. Christ must be Lord in reality. We can only have one citizenship, and that is a heavenly one.

Secondly, we are never called to fight by earthly means to uphold an outward standard of righteousness in this world. God is not doing that, and we are wasting our time and effort trying to do so on our own. Even where an outward standard is upheld due to laws, this does not make a man more righteous in God's eyes. There were many injustices in the time of Jesus--including slavery, abortion, heavy taxes, etc., but nowhere do we see that Jesus either by teaching or by example encouraged His disciples to get involved in the Roman government to change these things. He directed them to do exactly the opposite! He also did not encourage them to bring in democracy in order for everybody to have a say. The church is not a democracy, and democracy is not God's answer to sin. The government in the church is a theocracy (God in control of every man), and God's answer to man's problem is come out of the world and get into the church, under the rule of Christ.

We are commanded to let our light shine before men so that they will see God in us (Matthew 5:16). We also are called to be salt and light. Salt is that which affects and brings a good flavor where it is applied. Light illuminates the darkness so that things can be seen as they really are. To be light and to be salt are active places in God, but both are done as we are "about the Father's business" without becoming part of this world's system or using natural means.

Jesus is our perfect example. He affected every situation, spoke under the control of the Father, and yet never compromised or became involved in man's systems. On the contrary, He did not entrust himself to man because He knew what was in man. *"It is enough for a disciple to be as his Master"* (Matthew 10:25).

Questions may come to us about the place of human government. Are we not commanded to pray for it? Are leaders not set up and put down by God? Yes, we are commanded to pray *"for all men...that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence"* (I Timothy 2:1,2). Then is not God in control? God is still God, and He is working many things which are beyond us or our involvement. God only leaves Satan loose for His purposes, and when He chooses, Satan will be bound and Christ will rule this earth with a "rod of iron."

When we pray, we acknowledge the sovereignty of God over all, but that does not mean that God has called us to do everything that He is doing. Our calling is to display the love of God, show forth His mercy, give an expression of a heavenly life which shows forth the character of God, make disciples of all men, do good to all and especially the household of faith, and allow ourselves to be built together in the Body of Christ and the household of God. These and many other things form a full calling. In essence, we are to be about the Father's business today, as Christ was. Today we are the Body of Christ, to do the will of God on earth. None of these things in our calling require us to become involved in the system of man.

In the prayer of Jesus, we read these words: *"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world"* (John 17:15,16). There is a big difference between being "in the world" and "of the world."

Men have always struggled with this, and it cannot be worked out with our natural minds.

Some have taken themselves "out of this world" by moving to a very remote place away from all contact with people, in order to be more pure before God. In this place, they are no longer salt and light. There is no fragrance of a heavenly life among men; thus they are of no use to God. Others, trying to be salt and light, have joined themselves to the world to be a "witness." In so doing, they compromised, and the salt lost its flavor. Both of these roads are natural; both are equally wrong.

How can I be in the world and not of the world? Only by the power and wisdom of God. It takes God's life working in us and the constant leading of the Holy Spirit. There is no pat answer, no rulebook. Jesus went to a wedding feast and glorified God. Another time He stood before a high ruler of the land and opened not His mouth. One time He forgave a woman caught in adultery, and another time He picked up a whip and drove men out of the temple. How can we divide? How can we know when to do what? There is only one answer, and that is an intimate, ongoing, real relationship with God by the Spirit. It leaves us on our knees, utterly cast upon God for the next step. He is the one who knows all. Our place is to be under His authority, speak when He speaks, and work where He is working.

If we are working where God is not working or speaking when God is not speaking, we are wasting our time and effort, and it will only be "wood, hay, and stubble" in the end. Who wants that? We all want to stand before God and hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." God wants us to be under His control in every situation. If we are, God will control every situation He leads us into. The reason God does not control many of our circumstances is that God has not led us into them. Thus we are on our own, not knowing the grace or wisdom of God. The solution is to repent, get out of the situation, and get back on a solid footing in God.

One way we can test this is by the peace of God. He always leads us in His peace. When we are being controlled by God, it is a place of inward rest. We may earnestly contend for the faith delivered unto us, but always in a place of inner peace and confidence before God. Remember, God works from a place of strength to strength, victory to victory.

Another way to say the same thing is to say that Christ has called us to "abide in Him." He is doing the labor. He is building His church. We are called to abide in Him. This is a place of rest but also a place of diligence. Abiding is not drifting. It is active faith, keeping ourselves in the love of God. If we abide in Him, we will find ourselves separated from this world and actively involved in doing the will of God. We will find ourselves "outside the camp" of religion (man's efforts to please God) and outside the world's system. But at the same time, we will find a true godly care working in our hearts, and the Lord will be sending us down to a well to speak to a woman there, and tell her all the things that she ever did.

Again, there is no pattern, no rulebook, and no way to work it in our own energy. Every weapon is spiritual, and our place of discipline before God is very real. The calling is great, but He gives the grace. His leading will be according to the pattern revealed in the scriptures, for God never contradicts Himself. Scriptures do not substitute for the Holy Ghost, however, for our God is a creative God, full of surprises. His ways are not our ways, and we cannot predict how He will move. We must have ears for God so that we can be led.

Brethren, these few words are directed to those who have an ear to hear, and to those who may be confused over the constant cry we hear today to "get involved and change the world." May the Lord open all of our eyes to show us how and where to get involved so that we do not waste time and effort. The time is short, and we need to be about the Master's business.

May the Lord show each one of us what it means to be "in Christ," so that we can move in faith and please Him.