

CHRISTIANS, LOVE NOT THE WORLD

The world in scripture applies to not only material, but abstract things which have moral (or immoral), values (CP Jas 4:1-4; 1Jn 2:15-17). In the context of both Jas 4 and 1Jn 2, *the world* designates all that is alienated from and hostile to God. It refers to the sphere of human activity in which we live which is dominated by selfish ambition, greed, pride, self-gratifying pleasure, materialism and evil desires. The world hates Jesus and all who follow Him (CP Jn 1:10-12; 7:7; 15:18-25; 17:14; 1Cor 1:20-21; 1Jn 3:13). The spiritual force behind the world is Satan – he is the god of this world (CP Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2Cor 4:3-4; 1Jn 4:4; 5:19). Paul is not referring to Satan in 2Cor 4:4 as the “god of this world” in the sense that he is Deity, but because he is the one who controls this present world system, whether those in the world believe it or not (CP Jn 8:44; Ro 6:16; Eph 2:2; 1Jn 3:8). *World* also means *age*. In 2Cor 4:4 it refers to this present evil age with its cares, temptations and desires, both moral and physical. *Wickedness* in 1Jn 5:19 means literally, the wicked one – Satan.

The world encompasses all that is evil; the affairs of the world and the affairs of God are diametrically opposed to each other. Christians cannot be a part of the world system and please God (CP Mt 18:7; Ga 1:3-4; 2Pe 2:20). Those Peter refers to in 2Pe 2:20 were once saved Christians who apostatised and went back into the world. Peter clearly teaches what their end will be. Christians must only ever see themselves as strangers and pilgrims in the earth who are called to separate themselves from the world and no longer be conformed to it (CP Ro 12:1-2; 2Cor 6:14 – 7:1; Jas 1:27; 1Pe 2:11). In Ro 12:1-2 Paul exhorts Christians to set themselves apart wholly unto God and to be totally consecrated to His service. Christians are no longer to be conformed to a world system without God, but transformed by a renewed mind committed to the ideals of the Kingdom of God. Their thoughts, affections, purposes and desires must be centred on Heavenly and eternal things, not the things of this evil, temporal and transient world (CP Mt 6:19-21, 24; 1Ti 6:17).

2Cor 6:14 – 7:1 is explicit: it covers the whole spectrum of Christians’ involvement with non-Christians and the world system. Christians must not compromise themselves with the world because everything the world loves God hates (CP Lu 16:13-15). Christians cannot love the world and the things of the world, and God, at the same time (CP 1Cor 10:14-22; Ga 1:10). In 1Pe 2:11 Peter pleads with Christians in view of the fact that they are in this present world as strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land, without rights as citizens because their citizenship is in Heaven, to discipline themselves not to succumb to self-serving passions and desires that could damn their souls for eternity (CP 1Pe 2:11-12 with Ro 8:13; 13:14; Ga 5:24; Tit 2:11-12; 1Pe 4:1-4). Self-serving passions and desires covers the broad spectrum of fleshly lusts we examined in 1Jn 2:16 derived from an ungodly, corrupt world system. In the past Christians lived dissolute and profligate lives of self-gratification, now they must spend the time they have left for God’s glory (CP Ro 6:1-23; 8:1-13; Col 3:1-11).

Much in the world system is religious, refined and intellectual, but it is anti-God and anti-Christ. It is a

culture that exalts power, celebrity, status, pleasure, profit, honour. It makes idols out of sportsmen and women and hero-worships them. It exalts mens and womens bodies and promotes sexually explicit forms of entertainment. It is caught up in fashion trends and exalts wealth and possessions and arouses pride. Many Christians have been beguiled into believing that it is all harmless, but Satan’s strategy is to disarm the church by assimilating it into the world system (CP Mt 13:3-8, 18-23 with 1Pe 5:8). The term *deceitfulness of riches* in Mt 13:22 means that wealth gives a false impression – a false sense of security – whether by appearance, statement or influence. *Choke* in the same verse, means figuratively, to overpower. What this teaches is that the false sense of security emanating from material possessions and worldly wealth, overpowers the word of God in Christians and prevents them bearing fruit for the Kingdom. They have been seduced by their worldly wealth and material possessions from continuing in God’s service and so forfeit their place in God’s Eternal Kingdom (CP Jn 15:6).

Paul also teaches this (CP 1Ti 6:9-10). Paul’s perspective on worldly wealth is the same as Jesus’. *Erred* here also means seduced. Those who coveted wealth erred from the faith. They were seduced by their wealth away from God. *Perdition* refers to the state after death wherein exclusion from salvation is a realised fact, wherein man, instead of becoming what he might have been in God, is lost and ruined forever. This is a grim warning to Christians against focusing on accumulating worldly wealth and material possessions in this life, as opposed to serving God and storing up treasures for themselves in Heaven that will guarantee their security in the next life (CP Lu 12:13-15). The word *abundance* here means more than is needed, surplus to needs.

The lusts of the flesh in 1Jn 2:16 refers to the passionate cravings of the sin nature; the preoccupation with gratifying physical desires. These desires include obvious sins such as sexual immorality and murder, but they also include less obvious sins such as selfish ambition, hatred, jealousy and such like (CP Ga 5:19-21). Paul is addressing the church here, not unbelievers, as so many think. It is Christians who are involved in these sins – they are the only ones who can forfeit the Kingdom of God, not unbelievers, who never possessed it to start with. Furthermore, unbelievers cannot distinguish between walking in the Spirit or obeying the lusts of the flesh – only Christians can do that, which Paul had just admonished them to do (CP Ga 5:16-18 with Ro 8:1). Paul’s warning to the Galatian Christians against committing such worldly sins in Ga 5:19-21, extends to all Christians in all ages.

The lusts of the eyes in 1Jn 2:16 refers to the evil desires that are aroused by what the eyes behold when they look upon someone or something they should not be watching (CP Mt 6:22-23). Satan uses the eyes to incite evil desires. This includes the desire to watch pornography, ungodly behaviour and immorality – many Christians in the contemporary church are addicted to pornography (some even contend it is a “victimless crime”, not realising that they themselves are the victims). Jesus issues a dire warning to Christians against using their eyes for this purpose

(CP Mt 5:27-29). The lust of the eyes also applies to craving and accumulating worldly wealth and material possessions (CP Lu 12:15-31).

The pride of life in 1Jn 2:16 refers to an insolent and empty assurance which trusts in the things that serve the creature life and despise the things of God. It is a vain assurance in one's own resources: wealth, prominence, achievement; being obsessed with one's status or importance (CP Jas 4:13-16). Everything that arouses pride is part of the Satanic world system and will result in tragedy for Christians if they succumb to it (CP Pr 16:18-19; 27:1; 29:23; Ecc 5:10-16; 1Ti 6:6-10). Christians are in the world, but not of it, they must never allow themselves to be ensnared by the pleasure and promises that this life may offer (CP Mt 16:24-27; Lu 12:15; Ga 6:14; Eph 6:11-18). In Ga 6:14 Paul makes it clear that nothing should be as important to Christians as the cross of Christ. Because of the cross the world should be dead to Christians and they to the world. The world should have no more appeal to them or influence over them. The most important thing is that they become new creations in Christ (CP V 15 with Ro 6:3-10; 2Cor 5:17; Ga 2:20; Php 3:3, 7-8, 20-21).

Another reason Christians are not to love the world or the things of the world is that the world system is only temporary. It is destined to be destroyed by God in the age to come (CP 2Pe 3:7, 10-12). Even now the world system is in the process of passing away (CP 1Jn 2:17). In view of the transitory nature of the world system Christian values and priorities should only centre on God and the things of God (CP Mt 25:13-30; Lu 19:11-27; 1Th 5:6, 8, 11). Now let us go back to Jas 4, the first scripture subject of this study

and examine V 4 in more detail (CP Jas 4:4). Many in the contemporary church think that James is writing to unbelievers here, but to suggest that is to rob the passage of its teaching value for the church. The term *adulterers and adulteresses* (KJV), is used metaphorically of Christians who are Spiritually unfaithful to Christ and have become friends of the world. They will forfeit their place in God's Eternal Kingdom (CP Jer 3:20 with Ro 8:6-8). The love Christians profess for God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who redeemed their souls from eternal damnation, should make it abhorrent to them to even think that they could set their affections upon anything the world has to offer which defiles their fellowship with God.

In bringing this study to a close, let us look at a classic Old Testament example of just how easy it is to become attached to the world system and not let go of it (CP Gen 19:15-26). Lot's wife was saved out of that world system that God was about to destroy, but she was so caught up in it, she could not let go of it and looked back. She was saved, but lost it because she would not let go. By not letting go and in looking back, Lot's wife wilfully disobeyed God (CP V 17). This shows to what extent she had become attached to the world and it is the same today. Christians who love the world and the things of the world are wilfully disobeying God and thus become His enemy. They will likewise be lost. (See also author's study, *Christians and Wealth* in his book **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith** and *Haggai – the Significance of His Messages for Today*, in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 1)**).