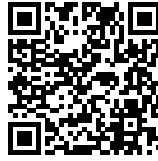




WAYS OF THE WORLD

Posted on March 1, 2019 by Alan Wilson



A group of first year medical students had just completed a tour of a hospital, and the nurse who had directed them was asking for questions. Immediately a hand went up. How is it that people who work here are always washing their hands a student asked?

The nurse gave a wise answer; 'they are always washing their hands for two reasons; first, they love health, and second, they hate germs'.

It's more than in hospital standards where ; love and hate go hand in hand. A husband who loves his wife is certainly going to have a hatred for what would harm her and vice versa.

In this letter of John's, he has reminded us to exercise Love, the right kind of love. Now it warns us that there is a wrong kind of love, a love that God hates. This is love for what the bible calls 'the world'.

We need to know first of all what does God mean by the world? Well it does NOT mean the world of nature and the beauty and wonder within it. All we have to do is Look at the beauty of; Niagara Falls, the animal and insect life in a tropical rain forest, the Grand Canyon, the beach at Benone, the Great Barrier Reef, Mount Everest, the list is endless. God created the world of nature that we can marvel at and enjoy; our God given task is to appreciate, care for, and be good stewards of it.

The world named here as our enemy is not the natural world, but an invisible Spiritual System opposed to God and Christ. It originates of course from Satan and is driven by him. It is the very opposite of what God stands for. This system is a set of ideas, of attitudes, of activities, of purposes brought about through people, developing into a common rule or system or systems. Many wars, ethnic cleansing, persecutions,

are examples but there are many more that never involve weapons.

Jesus called Satan, 'the prince of this world' meaning that he has a certain amount of control and influence over it which he undoubtedly has.

The devil has a highly skilled organisation of evil spirits working with him and influencing the affairs of this world which bring about certain outcomes. There are countless multitudes whether they realise it or not are energised by Satan to do his bidding and carry out his work.

But a more sinister reason why Christians are NOT to love the world is because of what the world does to us. For this world has an impact on us.

Being worldly is not so much a matter of activity, as of attitude. It is more than possible for a Christian to stay away from questionable amusements and dubious places and still love the world; because worldliness is a matter of the heart.

This is important; worldliness not only affects your response to the love of God; it also affects your response to the will of God. John clearly tells us in verse 17; 'the world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.'

Doing the will of God should be a joy for those living in the love of God. Jesus said; if you love me, you will keep my commandments. But when a Christian loses their enjoyment of the Father's love, they find it hard to obey the Father's will. Put very simply, anything in a Christian's life that causes them to lose their enjoyment of the father's love or their desire to do the father's will, is worldly and must be avoided.

Responding to God's love which means your personal devotional life; and doing God's will which means your daily conduct; these are two tests of worldliness.

Many things in this life are clearly wrong and God's word clearly identifies them as sins.

It is wrong to kill someone, it is wrong to lie and to steal. But there are other areas of Christian conduct that are not so clear and about which even the best Christian's disagree on. In such cases the believer must apply the test to their own lives and be honest in their self-examination, remembering that even a good thing may rob a believer of their enjoyment of God's love and their desire to do God's will.

John points out that the world system uses three devices to trap Christian's. There is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These same things trapped Eve in the garden of Eden. 'And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food (which is the lust of the flesh), and that it was pleasing to the eye (which is the lust of the eyes), and also desirable for gaining wisdom (which is the pride of life), she took some and ate it.

The lust of the flesh includes anything that appeals to man's fallen nature. The flesh does not mean the body as many think. Rather it refers to the base fallen nature of man that makes him blind to spiritual truth.

A Christian that is someone who trusts fully in God, has both the old nature the flesh; and the new nature the Spirit, in their lives. They both co-exist. And what a battle these two natures can wage. Let's look at how this conflict works out.

God has given men and women certain

desires and these desires are good. Hunger, thirst, tiredness, sex, are not at all bad in themselves. There is nothing wrong about eating, drinking, sleeping, or having children. But when the flesh nature controls them, they become sinful lusts.

Hunger is not wrong, but gluttony is sinful. Thirst is not wrong, but drunkenness is a sin. Sleep is a gift from God, but laziness is shameful. Sex is God's gift when used rightly, but when used wrongly in perverted ways, it becomes immorality.

We can see where the cross overs occur and how the world operates. It appeals to normal appetites, and at the same time tempts us to satisfy them in forbidden ways.

In today's world we are surrounded by all kinds of allurements that appeal to our lower nature. Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane said to his disciples as he returned and found them sleeping; 'the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak'. Here again we see the clash of the two natures. The Apostle Paul tells us we are to put 'no confidence in the flesh'.

The second device that the world uses to trap Christian's is the 'lust of the eyes.' Our eyes have an appetite too. 'Feast your eyes on this' we say. The lust of the flesh appeals to our base appetites of the old nature, whereas the lust of the eye operates in a more refined way.

In view here are pleasures that gratify the sight and the mind, sophisticated and intellectual pleasures. The Greeks and Romans lived for entertainment and activities that excited the eyes. Times have not changed very much in 3000 years. Our biggest threat today to corrupt us in what we see, comes in the form of a screen.

There are many examples in the bible

of the disastrous consequences when people saw something and lusted after it. Like Achan a soldier and a member of Joshua's army when he saw the silver and gold, and after being told by God not to take it, he took it. Which had devastating consequences.

King David from the roof of the palace Saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing who was already married to another man. His eyes incited his lust and he had to have her and she became pregnant to him. Once again with disastrous consequences.

Of course the eyes like the other senses are a gateway into the mind. The lust of the eyes therefore, can include intellectual pursuits that are contrary to God's word. There is pressure to make Christians think the way the world thinks and God warns us against the 'counsel of the ungodly.'

This of course does Not mean that Christians ignore education and secular learning; it does mean however, that they are careful not to let intellectualism crowd God into the background. A classic example of this is Darwin's theory of Evolution which essentially contradicts creation, neutralises God and destroys the dignity and worth of human beings. Yet is widely taught throughout the education system.

The third device is the 'boastful pride of life.' The original Greek word for pride was used to describe; 'a scoundrel who was trying to impress people with his importance'. Pride means to elevate a person's self-esteem or self-importance.

Pride originated first of all in the devil. We are told in the book of Proverbs; that 'before his downfall a man's heart is proud, and 'haughty eyes and a proud heart the lamp of the wicked, are sin.' People since the beginning of time have always tried to outdo others in their spending and their getting. The boastful pride of life motivates much of what many people do. **Wasteful consumerism is**

an epidemic with millions getting themselves into unnecessary debt; for what. To discard something perhaps of great value after a matter of days or weeks. All done largely to impress others for them to notice how affluent or successful they are.

Because of the pride of life, it is amazing what stupid things people do just to make an impression; even sacrificing honesty and integrity in return for notoriety and a feeling of importance. The world appeals to us through the lust of the flesh that is anything that makes us blind to spiritual truth; the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. It is important to note that no Christian becomes worldly all of a sudden. Worldliness creeps up on a Christian; it is a gradual process. And the Christian landscape is littered with causalities.

We can read where Abraham's nephew Lot embraced the various forms of worldliness in Sodom and Gomorrah which led to his downfall.

So how do we live in the world without being consumed by it? This is a huge challenge for us all in every generation. It's not easy and mistakes will be made. Sometimes lines will be blurred as in the case of Lot.

But John guides us by reminding us that we are little children. Those who love Jesus and trust in him become part of his family. And the very fact that we share in his nature ought to discourage us from becoming overly friendly with the world. James in his letter writes this; 'don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God. Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.' It's very clear.

But something else is true; we begin

as little children; but we must not stay as little children. Only as a Christian grows spiritually does he or she overcome the world. As young men and young women who develop into fathers and mother's and grandmother's and grandfather's we are to mature with the word of God. Surely no Christian who has experienced the joys and wonders of friendship with God, and of service for God, will want to live on the substitute pleasures this world offers.

The word of God is the only weapon that will defeat the advances of Satan. We need to be people to get back to reading and applying the word of God to our lives. It is the growing, maturing Christians to whom the world does not appeal because they realise that the things of this world are only toys. A Christian should never be 'over friendly' with the world because of what the world is and we should always remember this. The world is and continues to be a Satanic System that hates and opposes Christ. That's why they crucified him. The world seeks to attract and snare us to live on sinful substitutes that will never satisfy.

Slowly and surely and perhaps sooner than we think, 'this world in its present form is passing away; but the man or woman, boy or girl, who does God's will abides forever'.

Rev. Alan Wilson is a Presbyterian Minister in Northern Ireland, where he serves a large congregation, supported by his wife. Before he took up the call to serve Christ, he was in the Royal Ulster Constabulary for 30-years. He has two children and two grandchildren and enjoys soccer, gardening, zoology, politics and reading. He voted for Brexit in the hope that the stranglehold of Brussels might finally be broken. He welcomes any that might wish to correspond with him through the [Contact Page](#) of The Postil.

The [photo](#) shows, "What is Truth," by Nikolai Ge, painted in 1890.

