



Blackfoot Church of Christ

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In the World not of the World

By William Stewart

In John 17, as Jesus prayed to the Father for His disciples, He focused a lot on the relationship between His disciples and the world (Jn 17:11-18). Though we are in the world, we are not to be of the world. What does this mean? How do we apply this truth in our daily lives? John would also write:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 Jn 2:15-17)

Other Bible writers contribute to the discussion of the Christian's relationship to the world. James states "pure and undefiled religion..." involves keeping "...oneself unspotted from the world" (Jam 1:27). Later in the same epistle, "Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). Peter acknowledged the possibility of a return to worldliness, stating some had "...escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..." but "...are again entangled in them and overcome..." (2 Peter 2:20). Paul characterizes what surrounds us as "...a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world..." (Phil 2:15).

We should be careful about our association with the world and participation in the things of the world. Some zealously take extreme measures to separate themselves from the world, choosing to live in monasteries (from the Greek, monazein, meaning "to live alone"). Others subscribe to asceticism, defined by m-w.com as "practicing strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline." Extreme asceticism often involves self-flagellation and other forms of harm to the body. Less severe, but still strict, are those who refuse the use of modern technology (cars, electricity, telephones, etc.). Still on the asceticism spectrum are those who oppose reading, watching, or listen to entertainment belonging to this world. The list could (and does) go on: playing card or board games, secular observance of Christmas, celebrating birthdays, taking family vacations, etc.. In fact, I know an individual who is adamant that if it is not of God and does not give glory to God, then it is of the devil and sinful for a Christian to participate in.

Ascetic measures may seem extreme. However, those who ascribe to these practices and restrictions believe such is necessary to keep the Lord's command not to be of the world. So, what is the truth? What does the Lord expect us to do (or not do) so we are in the world but not of the world? All agree that one can be too permissive, but can one also not be too rigid? Is it a "black and white" issue? Is there a "one size fits all" solution?

The criteria for what we should or should not do is not determined by whether it is of this world (secular) or of God (spiritual). It is erroneous to infer that everything we do must be spiritual in nature, and that if it is not, we are displeasing to God. There are many things we do which are neither pleasing to nor displeasing to God. They are spiritually neutral. Should you have salmon or roast beef on your sandwich? God doesn't care. Neither is pleasing to Him; neither is displeasing to Him. 1 Corinthians 8:8 reads, "...food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse." Should you work as a grocery store clerk or as an electrical engineer? Again, it makes no difference to the Lord. Neither are spiritual in nature, nor are they sinful in nature. The Lord also doesn't care what brand of car you drive, whether you own your home or rent it, what neighborhood you live in, how many children you have, etc.. There are a host of things in life that are neither here nor there to the Lord. He is not in the business of micromanaging our lives.

Paul quoted an Athenian poet in Acts 17:28, who had written, "For we are also His offspring." We don't have access to the entire poem Paul cited from, but we know it was not Scripture. It was the work of a pagan poet. Paul read the word of an Athenian poet and quoted it! Why would an apostle of Christ do such a thing?

To the church at Corinth, Paul wrote, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful" (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23). He is not speaking about things that are inherently sinful (i.e., idolatry, fornication, theft, etc.). Such things would not be deemed lawful. He is speaking about spiritual neutral things; things that are a matter of choice, preference or interest. Some things are part of life, but not part of our service to God. Again, do we eat the salmon or the roast beef? Both are lawful. One may be healthier (i.e., more helpful) than the other, but neither is sinful.

1 Corinthians 6:12 continues, "all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Some things, even things that are lawful, can be addictive. Again, they're not inherently wrong, but if we come under their power (i.e., we absolutely need it), then we have a problem. Things that are lawful (spiritually neutral, not inherently right or wrong) can become sinful if we become obsessed with them.

The latter part of 1 Corinthians 10:23 says, "all things are lawful for me, but not all things will edify." Something may be lawful for us but discouraging to others. In the context, Paul uses the eating of meats as an illustration. "Eat whatever is set before you, asking no questions for conscience' sake" (v. 27). All meats are OK to eat, they are lawful. He gives one caveat; if you are told, "This was offered to idols," don't eat it. Why? Not because the idol is anything (1 Cor 8:4), but to avoid violating the conscience of the one who is cognizant of the idol. The meat was still "lawful," but because one who may be offended by the consumption of the meat, Paul said do not eat out of concern for the weak brother's faith (Roms 14:1-2). That said, the weak brother's faith does not become the standard for all others in all situations. Paul said,

“let not him who eats despise him who does not eat and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him” (Roms 14:3). The brother who sees no problem with the meat offered to an idol is free to eat, except when the weak brother is present, lest he violate the weak brother’s conscience.

So, how does this apply to secular entertainment and activities? First, let’s acknowledge they are spiritually neutral; they are things which are a matter of choice, preference or interest. Unless there is something inherently sinful in them (i.e., vulgarity, sensuality, blasphemy, etc.), they are not sinful. They are things which are “lawful,” but “do not edify.”

As per 1 Corinthians 6:12, we need to be careful not to be “brought under the power” of such things. It is fine to have hobbies, to enjoy spiritually neutral activities, but our participation should be with moderation. Anything has the potential to become an addiction – to consume too much of our time, energy, or money. Non-spiritual secular pursuits are not sinful, but they are not the purpose of life. May we not treat them as though they were. If an activity keeps us from serving the Lord or affects our devotion to Him adversely, we need to make changes. The Lord must always be our first priority.

Something may be lawful for me, but offensive to my brother. I should be conscientious of the weaker brother. I should not invite him to participate in what I know will violate his conscience. Equally, the weaker brother should not judge me or seek to impose his conscience on me. In matters of opinion, we need to respect one another’s freedom, and not demand that a brother or sister concede to our opinion as a necessary standard. Each one is free to have their own personal faith on what secular activities they will or will not participate in. Creating rules and making restrictions God has not made doesn’t make us more holy. Outlawing things that are “lawful” is a self-imposed religion bolstered by false humility. Note Paul’s message to the Colossians:

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) - in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. (Col 2:20-23, NASB).

Being in the world but not of the world does not require us to be hermits; it requires us to use discernment and discretion. Are there things we shouldn’t read? Sure. Are there movies we shouldn’t watch? Absolutely. Are there places we shouldn’t go and activities we shouldn’t engage in? Indeed. However, that doesn’t mean everything in the world is sinful and must be avoided. Why did Paul read the works of an Athenian poet? I suspect he enjoyed poetry. He understood it was not inherently sinful to read the writings of a pagan. The same apostle made reference to athletic activity in his inspired writings (1 Cor 9:24-26; 1 Tim 6:12; Jude 1:3; etc.). Surely he was not citing inherently sinful activities to teach us about serving God. To be in the world but not of the world means we abstain from the wickedness of the world, not from living in the world.

Prayer Requests & Announcements

- Rachel will be traveling here with Ross's parents. They plan to leave AR Monday. Rachel will be spending the fall here in Blackfoot.
- Shirley Torres, Seattle WA (Torres' have visited our congregation) is fighting cancer. Chemo treatments have not been successful. They have decided to stop the Chemo and pursue other treatments to help enhance her quality of life.
- Keep April in your prayers as she deals with health issues
- The Christians in the Philippines.
- Bible class tomorrow night 7:00pm at Chad and Kass' on evangelism

For prayer requests, call or text

Chad @ (208) 221-2587 or Ross @ (208) 680-6590

Assignments

<u>Today</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – David Porter Lord's Table – Tom Mitchell Sermon – Ross Ward	<u>Wednesday</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – Chad Mitchell Invitation – Ross Ward
<u>Next Sunday</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – Ross Ward Lord's Table – David Porter Sermon – Chad Mitchell	<u>Next Wednesday</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – Tom Mitchell Invitation – Ross Ward

Blackfoot Church of Christ
370 North Shilling Ave.
Blackfoot, Idaho 83221

Meeting Times:

Sunday Morning Classes 10:00AM
Sunday Morning Worship 11:00AM
Wednesday Evening 7:30PM



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