

The Christian & the World

I. C. Herendeen

“Love not the world...The world passeth away, and the lust thereof”(I John 2:15,17).

“Be not conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2).

“Come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Cor. 6:17).

The Christian is plagued by three great, powerful and subtle enemies-”the world, the flesh and the devil.” They are terrible foes which must be overcome if we are to be saved. However, at this time we will consider but one of these enemies which Scripture warns us not to be “conformed” unto, namely “the world.” It is not easy to give a clear definition, but we would, with another, describe it as both “a society and a system.” “As a society, it is composed of ‘the world of the ungodly’ (2 Pet. 2:5), of ‘men of the world which have their portion in this life’ (Psa. 17:14). It is composed only of unregenerate humanity, the Lord having delivered all His people from ‘this present evil world’ (Gal. 1:4). Though still in it, the Christian is no longer of it. As a system, it is under the dominion of Satan who is its ‘prince’ (John 12:31) who regulates its policies and its politics.” He is its “god” (2 Cor. 4:4) directing its religions. Eph. 2:2 tells us the unregenerate “walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.”

Considered morally, the world is synonymous with the kingdom of Satan (Matt. 12:26), or the unregenerate part of humanity. It is fallen human nature acting under the influence of the devil. “The spirit of the world is hostile to godliness, dominated by carnal ambition, pride, avarice, self-pleasing and sensuous desires and interests. Its opinions are false, its aims selfish, its pleasures sinful, its influence thoroughly corrupt, its honors an empty bauble” (something showy but worthless). The world is the sphere of rebellion against God; it is away from God and in opposition to Him. Unregenerate persons think only of this world’s ways and things to the neglect of “the world to come.” They are always thinking more of earth than of heaven, more of time than eternity, more of the body than of pleasing God. Both the religious and profane world are under the control of Satan in their ways, habits, customs, tastes, practices and aims, and in these things are a great and subtle enemy of our souls. Every one who is a true Christian and determined to please the Lord will be in earnest in renouncing these things, and will earnestly seek to order his life by God’s standard, the Holy Scriptures.

The world surrounds us. We have it exhibited on every hand day in and day out. For example, the very immodest and lustful way in which women dress; wearing that which Holy Writ strictly forbids (see Deut. 22:5; I Tim 2:9) to their shame. Dear friend, if you really love the Lord, see to it that you are not guilty of such forbidden practices. Remember, God’s stern command is “Be not conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2), to its wicked ways, customs or fashions. Believers ought to live in marked contrast from it; we ought rather to be “conformable unto His [Christ’s] death” (Phil. 3:10). Instead of being conformed unto this world we ought to be more and more separated from the world (2 Cor. 6:16-18). Its ungodly ways ought to be abhorrent to us, and especially those of the unregenerate professing religious world which “hates” our blessed Saviour (John 15:25), and which “put Him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:6).

The world seeks to gratify its lusts with no thought of nor concern for God’s will or glory; hence, we must tread the path of separation from it in obedience to Him. It is God’s purpose that His people, all His people, should detach their affections and interests completely from the things of this visible and corruptible and perishing order, and “set them upon things above” (Col 3:2). But as things are now it is hard to detect any line of demarcation between the Christian and the world. As so many do deport themselves, it is most difficult if not impossible to distinguish “him

that believeth” from him that “believeth not.” It was never contemplated that the Lord’s people should make themselves at home here, for their “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). God separated Abraham from his people, and ‘righteous Lot’ and his household from the inhabitants of the plain. He carefully separated Israel from the nations, setting them apart by peculiar laws and customs. And in this age He commands His Church to ‘have no fellowship’ with unbelievers, or be ‘unequally yoked’ with them

In the light of this, what about us? Are we taking a definite stand in this matter? If we are not, why not? Will the Lord accept any of our excuses? He has given us our marching orders when He said we are to “go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing [not seeking to avoid] His reproach” (Heb. 13:13). Do we think we can mix in our lives the things of this wicked world, and not sin? Impossible! Sin is a serious matter. The very Son of God suffered and died to put it away, yet great numbers posing as Christians are taking an active and prominent part in the world’s merry-making and mad scramble after its pleasures, wealth and temporal benefits! In a matter so solemn can we, dare we, afford pretense and trifling! If we really believe these things then let us live and act as though we believe them, and really be what we profess to be. If we do not believe them, then let us quit the miserable pretense of being followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, members of His body. In other words, let us quit being hypocrites and take our Christian profession seriously. He who seeks God must be prepared to make a full surrender of all worldly prospects, pleasures and benefits, and give himself wholly to God. We must be willing to give Him all the affections of our hearts, for His command is: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart” (Matt. 22:37). The world from which the Christian is to detach himself “lieth in the evil one” (I John 5:19).

It is a sad fact but there are two kinds of “Christians”—the converted and the unconverted, “possessors and professors.” The professors are overcome by the love of the world, the cares of the world, the business of the world, the money of the world, the pleasures of the world, the desire to go along with the world, and, alas, the desire to be like the world.

Of course, with all their worldliness, they must be religious and pretend to piety. “They make no objection to any article of belief of the Christian faith, nor do they deliberately choose evil and openly rebel against God. No, for with all their worldliness they hope to get to heaven at last. They think it only proper that they should have a religion of some sort, though they are not too particular what it is just so long as they are religious. But they cannot and do not intend to give up their idols. Religion is very popular with them just so long as it does not interfere with their worldly desires and ambitions...Just so long as they can have their religion and world, too.”

When our Lord commanded through Paul to “Come out from among them,” He did not mean that the Christian must give up all his worldly callings, his trade, his profession, his business if lawful and according to the Word of God, for then he “must needs go out of the world” (I Cor. 5:10). He did not forbid any should be bankers, farmers, or lawyers, for example. God expects His people not to be idle, but busy “working with his hands the thing that is good” (Eph. 4:28). “If any man will not work neither shall he eat” (II Thess. 3:10). We are not to give up any lawful work, but “do with our might whatsoever our hands find to do” (Eccl. 9:10), being careful to carry our testimony with us into our business, conducting it in “the fear of the Lord” and to “the glory of God.” Neither are we to stand aloof from all intercourse with unconverted people, and refuse their society entirely. Our Lord and His disciples did not; they went to the marriage feast and sat at the Pharisee’s table.

Christians are not to be odd, eccentric and strange in their dress, ways of behaviour, conduct or voice. Such things attract notice but are most objectionable, unnatural, and ought to be carefully avoided. To wear clothes of such a color, for instance, or made in such a fashion as that you will be a public spectacle and the object of comment is wrong and dishonoring to the Lord. You may be sure that our Lord and His apostles and their companions dressed and acted as befitted their place and rank in life. It was the Pharisees who “made broad their phylacteries, and enlarged the borders of their garments.” Why?—“To be seen of men” (Matt. 23:5). True sanctity (saintliness,

holiness, purity) is one thing, and sanctimoniousness (pretended piety, religious hypocrisy) is another.

As Christians we must beware of being swallowed up and absorbed in the affairs of this world. Whatever we be, banker, farmer or lawyer, we will, of course, strive to do our duty and to do it well. "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. 3:23). But we must take care that we do not permit our work to come between us and Christ. If we find that our temporal affairs are interfering with our Bible reading, prayer and meditation, and encroaching on our Sundays so that we do not have time for the Lord as we ought; we will choose being less rich and prosperous in this world rather than that our souls should not prosper. This may require real self-denial, but it is the way of true separation from the world. We are to be "temperate in all things" (I Cor. 9:25), even in things lawful. Anything that takes up too much of our time and attention so that we do not have sufficient time for the things of the Lord is to be eschewed. We are to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33).

We are also commanded to "redeem the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). This means that we are to buy up our opportunities and invest them for eternity. Every moment of free time is to be used to the best advantage and not in idleness or other ways to no profit for the time to come. The divine fiat is, "Give attendance to reading" (I Tim. 4:13). This commandment is to be obeyed, not ignored. We should make ourselves very familiar with the Word, and also "hide" it in our hearts (Psa. 119:11). For this we should set apart a portion of each day for reading and meditating on the Holy Scriptures. In addition, we should read with diligence and care good books on the Bible written by accredited authors whom God has gifted to be teachers of His flock. If we plead lack of time then let us see that we make time, for we always have time for what we really want to do. Paul wrote Timothy requesting him: "...when thou comest, bring...the books, and especially the parchments" (II Tim. 4:13).

Of course it is no easy thing to "come out from" the world. It requires a constant struggle and exertion, incessant conflict and self-denial. To come decidedly out from the ways of the world and be unmistakably separate requires a real determination. But if our heart is right everything else will be right in time. We should set before our minds every day as grand realities, which they are, the matter of our soul's eternal welfare: God, Christ, heaven, hell, death, judgment to come and eternity. Let us remind ourselves that what we do not see is just as real as what we do see, and ten thousand times more important. Armed with this faith we will regard this world as a mere shadow compared with the reality of "the world to come." We will disdain its praise or blame, its enmity or rewards. Moses "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasure of Egypt" and so "he forsook Egypt;" for "he endured as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:26). Dear friends, "the time is short;" "the end of all things is at hand," the shadows are lengthening, the sun has nearly gone down. "The night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4). The judgment will soon be set and "the books opened." Are you ready for the great Judgment Day? Let us awake and "come out from the world" while "it is called today." In a little while the things as we now see them will have passed away-no more "eating and drinking, feasting and frolicking, making and getting gain" (James 4:13). If these are the things our hearts have been set upon and we have pursued so ardently, what will we do when all have passed away forever? How could we ever think of being happy in heaven, a place of holiness and where worldliness has no place whatever!

O friends, consider these things more seriously than you have ever done before. Awake while there is yet time and "set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). Persevere in your separation from the world and be a most decided Christian. You will never regret having lived too holy and too separated a life.