

# **THE SCRIPTURES AND THE WORLD**

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Not a little is written to the Christian in the New Testament about “the world” and his attitude towards it. Its real nature is plainly defined, and the believer is solemnly warned against it. God’s holy Word is a light from heaven, shining here “in a dark place” (II Peter 1:19). Its Divine rays exhibit things in their true colours, penetrating and exposing the false veneer and glamour by which many objects are cloaked. That world upon which so much labour is bestowed and money spent, and which is so highly extolled and admired by its blinded dupes, is declared to be “the enemy of God;” therefore are His children forbidden to be “conformed” to it and to have their affections set upon it.

The present phase of our subject is by no means the least important of those that have already been before us, and the serious reader will do well to seek Divine grace to measure himself or herself by it. One of the exhortations which God has addressed to His children is, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (I Peter 2:2), and it behooves each one of them honestly and diligently to examine himself so as to discover whether or not this be the case with him. Nor are we to be content with an increase of mere head-knowledge of Scripture: what we need to be most concerned about is our practical growth, our experimental conformity to the image of Christ. And one point at which we may test ourselves is, Does my reading and study of God’s Word make me less worldly?

### **1. *Discern the true character of the world***

We profit from the Word when our eyes are opened to *discern the true character of the world*. One of the poets wrote, “God’s in His Heaven - all’s right with the world.” From one stand point that is blessedly true, but from another it is radically wrong, for “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (I John 5:19) but it is only as the heart is supernaturally enlightened by the Holy Spirit that we are enabled to perceive that that which is highly esteemed among men is really “abomination in the sight of god” (Luke 16:15). It is much to be thankful for when the soul is able to see that the “world” is a gigantic fraud, a hollow bauble, a vile thing, which must one day be burned up.

Before we go farther, let us define that “world” which the Christian is forbidden to love. There are few words found upon the pages of Holy Writ used with a greater variety of meanings than this one. Yet careful attention to the context will usually determine its scope. The “world” is a system or order of things, complete in itself. No foreign element is suffered to intrude, or if it does it is speedily accommodated or assimilated to itself. The “world” is fallen human nature acting itself out in the human family, fashioning the framework of human society in accord with its own tendencies. It is the organized kingdom of the “carnal mind” which is “enmity against God” and which is “not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). Wherever the “carnal mind” is, there is “the world;” so that worldliness is the world without God.

## **2. *An enemy to be resisted and overcome***

We profit from the Word when we learn that the world is *an enemy to be resisted and overcome*. The Christian is bidden to “fight the good fight of faith” (I Tim. 6:12), which implies that there are foes to be met and vanquished. As there is the Holy Trinity - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - so also there is an evil trinity - the flesh, the world, and the devil. The child of God is called unto a mortal combat with them; “mortal” we say, for either they will destroy him or he will get the victory over them. Settle it, then, in your mind, my reader, that the world is a deadly enemy, and if you do not vanquish it in your heart then you are no child of God, for it is written “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world” (I John 5:4).

Out of many, the following reason may be given as to why the world must be “overcome.” First, all its alluring objects tend to divert the attention and alienate the affections of the soul from God. Necessarily so, for it is the tendency of things seen to turn the heart away from things unseen. Second, the spirit of the world is diametrically opposed to the Spirit of Christ, therefore did the apostle write, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God” (I Cor. 2:12). The Son of God came into the world, but “the world knew Him not” (John 1:10), therefore did its “princes” and rulers crucify Him (I Cor. 2:8). Third, its concerns and cares are hostile to a devout and heavenly life. Christians, like the rest of mankind, are required by God to labour six days in the week; but while so employed they need to be constantly on their guard, lest covetous interests govern them rather than the performance of duty.

“This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (I John 5:4). Naught but a God-given faith can overcome the world. But as the heart is occupied with invisible yet eternal realities, it is delivered from the corrupting influence of worldly objects. The eyes of faith discern the things of sense in their real colours, and see that they are empty and vain, and not worthy to be compared with the great and glorious objects of eternity. A felt sense of the perfections and presence of God makes the world appear less than nothing. When the Christian views the Divine Redeemer dying for his sins, living to intercede for his perseverance, reigning and overruling things for his final salvation, he exclaims, “there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.”

And how is it with you, dear reader? You may cordially assent to what has just been said in the last paragraph, but how is it with you actually? Do the things which are so highly valued by the unregenerate charm and enthrall you? Take away from the worldling those things in which he delights, and he is wretched: is this so with you? Or, are your present joy and satisfaction found in objects which can never be taken from you? Treat not these questions lightly, we beseech you, but ponder them seriously in the presence of God. The honest answer to them will be an index to the real state of your soul, and will indicate whether or not you are deceived into supposing yourself to be “a new creature in Christ Jesus.”

### **3. Christ died to deliver us from “this present evil world”**

We profit from the Word when we learn that *Christ died to deliver us from “this present evil world”* (Gal. 1:4). The Son of God came here not only to “fulfil” the requirements of the law (Matt. 5:17), to “destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:8), to deliver us “from the wrath to come” (I Thess. 1:10), to save us from our sins (Matt. 1:21), but also to free us from the bondage of this world, to deliver the soul from its enthralling influence. This was foreshadowed of old in God’s dealings with Israel. They were slaves in Egypt, and “Egypt” is a figure of the world. They were in cruel bondage, spending their time in “making bricks” for Pharaoh. They were unable to free themselves. But Jehovah, by His mighty power, emancipated them, and brought them forth out of the “iron furnace.” Thus does Christ with His own. He breaks the power of the world over their hearts. He makes them independent of it, that they neither court its favours nor fear its frowns.

Christ gave Himself a sacrifice for the sins of His people that, in consequence thereof, they might be delivered from the damning power and governing influence of all that is evil in this present world: from Satan, who is its prince; from the lusts which predominate in it; from the vain conversation of the men who belong to it. Now the Holy Spirit indwelling the saints co-operates with Christ in this blessed work. He turns their thoughts and affections away from earthly things to heavenly. By the working of His power, He frees from the demoralizing influence which surrounds us, and conforms to the heavenly standard. And as the Christian grows in grace he recognizes this, and acts accordingly. He seeks yet fuller deliverance from this “present evil world,” and begs God to free him from it completely. That which once charmed him now nauseates. He longs for the time when he shall be taken out of this scene where his blessed Lord is so grievously dishonoured.

### **4. When our hearts are weaned from the world**

We profit from the Word *when our hearts are weaned from it*. “Love not the world neither the things that are in the world” (II John 2:15). “What the stumbling block is to the traveller in the way, the weight to the runner, the lime twigs to the bird in its flight, so is the love of the world to a Christian in his course - either wholly diverting him from, greatly enticing him in, or forcibly turning him out of it” (Nath. Hardy, 1660). The truth is that until the heart be purged from this corruption the ear will be deaf to Divine instruction. Not until we are lifted above the things of time and sense can we be subdued unto obedience to God. Heavenly Truth glides off a carnal mind as water from a spherical body.

The world has turned its back upon Christ, and though His name is professed in many places, yet will it have nothing to do with Him. All the desires and designs of worldlings are for the gratification of self. Let their aims and pursuits be as varied as they may, self being supreme, everything is subordinated to the pleasing thereof. Now Christians are in the world, and cannot get out of it; they have to live their Lord’s appointed time in it. While here they have to earn their living, support their families, and attend to their worldly business. But they are forbidden to love the world, as though it could make them happy. Their “treasure” and “portion” are to be found elsewhere.

The world appeals to every instinct of fallen man. It contains a thousand objects to charm him: they attract his attention, the attention creates a desire for and love of them, and insensibly yet surely they make deeper and deeper impressions on his heart. It has the same fatal influence on all classes. But attractive and appealing as its varied objects may be, all the pursuits and pleasures of the world designed and adopted to promote the happiness of this life only - therefore, "what shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" The Christian is taught by the Spirit, and through His presenting of Christ before the soul his thoughts are diverted from the world. Just as a little child will readily drop a dirty object when something more pleasing is offered to it, so the heart which is in communion with God will say, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.. and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8).

## **5. *When we walk in separation from the world***

We profit from the Word *when we walk in separation from the world*. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). Such a verse as this ought to search every one of us through and through, make us tremble. How can I fraternize with or seek my pleasure in that which condemned the Son of God? If I do, that at once identifies me with His enemies. Oh, my reader, make no mistake upon this point. It is written, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (I John 2:15).

Of old it was said of the people of God that they "shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23:9). Surely disparity of character and conduct, the desires and pursuits, which distinguish the regenerate from the unregenerate must separate the one from the other. We who profess to have our citizenship in another world, to be guided by another Spirit, to be directed by another rule, and to be journeying to another country, cannot go arm and arm with those who despise all such things! Then yet everything in and about us exhibit the character of Christian pilgrims. May we indeed be "men wondered at" (Zech. 3:8) because "not conformed to this world" (Rom 12:2).

## **6. *When we evoke the hatred of the world***

We profit from the Word *when we evoke the hatred of the world*. What pains are taken in the world to save appearances and keep up a seemly and good state! Its conventionalities and civilities, its courtesies and charities, are so many contrivances to give an air of respectability to it. So too its churches and cathedrals, its priests and prelates are needed to gloss over the corruption which seethes beneath the surface. And to make good weight "Christianity" is added, and the holy name of Christ is taken upon the lips of thousands of those who have never taken His "yoke" upon them. Of them God says, "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me" (Matt. 15:8).

And what is to be the attitude of all real Christians toward such? The answer of Scripture is plain: “from such turn away” (II Tim. 3:5). “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord” (II Cor. 6:17). And what will follow when this Divine command is obeyed? Why, then we shall prove the truth of those words of Christ’s: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). Which “world” is specifically in view here? Let the previous verse answer: “If the world hate you, ye know it hated Me before it hated you.” What “world” hated Christ and hounded Him to death? The religious world, those who pretended to be most zealous for God’s glory. So it is now. Let the Christian turn his back upon a Christ-dishonouring Christendom, and his fiercest foes and most relentless and unscrupulous enemies will be those who claim to be Christians themselves! But “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, — for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad” (Matt. 5:11,12). Ah, my brother, it is a healthy sign, a sure mark that you are profiting from the Word, when the religious world hates you. But if, on the other hand, you still have a “good standing” in the “churches” or “assemblies” there is grave reason to fear that you love the praise of men more than that of God!

## **7. *When we are elevated above the world***

We profit from the Word *when we are elevated above the world*. First above its customs and fashions. The worldling is a slave to the prevailing habits and styles of the day. Not so the one who is walking with God: his chief concern is to be “conformed to the image of His Son.” Second, above its cares and sorrows: of old it was said of the saints that they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had “in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. 10:34). Third, above its temptations: what attraction has the glare and glitter of the world for those who are “delighting themselves in the Lord?” None whatever. Fourth, above its opinions and approvals. Have you learned to be independent of and defy the world? If your whole heart is set upon pleasing God, you will be quite unconcerned about the frowns of the godless.

Now, my reader, do you really wish to measure yourself by the contents of this article? Then seek honest answers to the following questions. First, what are the objects before your minds in times of recreation? What do your thoughts most run upon? Second, what are the objects of your choice? When you have to decide how to spend an evening or the Sabbath afternoon, what do you select? Third, which occasions you the most sorrow, the loss of earthly things, or lack of communion with God? Which causes you greater grief (or chagrin), the spoiling of your plains or the coldness of your heart to Christ? Fourth, what is your favourite topic of conversation? Do you hanker after the news of the day, or to meet with those who talk of the “altogether lovely” One? Fifth, do your “good intentions” materialize, or are they nothing but empty dreams? Are you spending more or less time than formerly on your knees? Is the Word sweeter to your taste, or has your soul lost its relish for it?