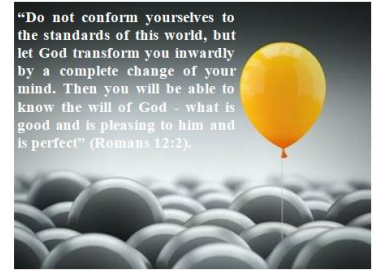


## DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind [cp. Ephesians 4:23], that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God [cp. Ephesians 5:17]” (Romans 12:2).



### Introduction

1. John says that the Devil has sway over the whole world (1 John 5:19), which he maintains through seven avenues (e.g., media, public education system). It is through these seven avenues that worldly principles are disseminated, and it is to these principles we must no longer allow ourselves to be conformed (Romans 12:2).
2. Are we allowing ourselves to be conformed to Christ (Romans 8:29) or are we still conforming to the principles of this world?
3. In this lesson, we shall look at a few passages that refer to worldliness. Our purpose is that we might overcome the world and be more pleasing to God. After all, that is our aim (2 Corinthians 5:9).

I. Do Not Love The World (1 John 2:15-17)

II. Worldliness Prevents Maturity (Luke 8:14)

III. Any Christian Can Be Drawn Back Into The World (Hebrews 11:24-26)

IV. Overcoming Worldliness (Romans 8:5)

### I. Do Not Love The World

God has called us out of the world and it is essential that have nothing further to do with it. To love the world and the things in the world reveals two things (i) the love of the Father is not in us (1 John 2:15), (ii) we are enemies of God (James 4:4).

“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 John 2:15-17).

1. Note how the word “world” is used in different ways:

- a. In this verse “world” refers to the earth.

“Tremble before Him, all the earth. **The world also is firmly established**, It shall not be moved” (1 Chronicles 16:30).

- b. In this verse “world” refers to all mankind.

“**For God so loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

- c. In this verse “world” refers to “the invisible spiritual system of evil dominated by Satan and all that it offers in opposition to God, His Word, and His people” (John MacArthur).

“**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” (1 John 2:15).

- d. In this verse the word “world” refers to the sum of temporal possessions.

“For what profit is it to a man if he **gains the whole world**, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26).

“And you He made alive, when you were dead in your trespasses and sins. In which at one time you habitually walked. You were following the course and fashion of this world [were under the sway of the tendency of this present age], following the prince of the power of the air. You were obedient to and under the control of the demon spirit that still constantly works in the sons of disobedience [the careless, the rebellious, and the unbelieving, who go against the purposes of God]. Among these we as well as you once lived and conducted ourselves in the passions of our flesh [our behavior governed by our corrupt and sensual nature], obeying the impulses of the flesh and the thoughts of the mind [our cravings dictated by our senses and our dark imaginings]. We were then by nature children of God's wrath and heirs of His indignation, like the rest of mankind” (Ephesians 2:1-3).

The word “world” is can mean...

- The earth (1 Chronicles 16:30).
- All mankind (John 3:16).
- “The invisible spiritual system of evil dominated by Satan and all that it offers in opposition to God, His Word, and His people” (John MacArthur) (1 John 2:15).

2. A Christian has been called out of the world (“the invisible spiritual system of evil dominated by Satan and all that it offers in opposition to God, His Word, and His people” - John MacArthur) and must no longer have a love for that wicked spiritual system or the things in it, i.e., “we are not to love the things which are sought merely to pamper the appetite, to please the eye, or to promote pride in living. These are the objects sought by the people of the world; these are not the objects to be sought by the Christian” (Albert Barnes<sup>1</sup>).
3. John speaks of the “things” in the world that are not of God: (i) the lust of the flesh, (ii) the lust of the eyes, and (iii) the pride of life. All sinful things of the world fall under these three categories. To set the mind on any of these things will draw you away from God. Instead, we ought to set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:2).
  - a. The lust (desire) of the flesh. John is not here speaking of the legitimate, fleshy desires, but has sensuality in mind: gluttony (Proverbs 23:20-21), drunkenness (Proverbs 23:29-32), sexual activity outside of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:2). Here, the “flesh” (sarx) does not refer to merely “the body” or even “the physical self”, but to all of human nature as it has been corrupted by sin (Daniel H. King, Sr.).
  - b. The lust of the eyes. This is more than simply what the eyes see, “but also what is encompassed and embraced by the mind and the imagination. It can seek its satisfaction through the media of literature and art, and perhaps is the more pronounced when unsatisfied; its complete satisfaction would include yielding to the lust of the flesh. This kind of lust represents the tendency to be captivated by the outward show of things, without inquiring into or even caring about their real or eternal values” (Daniel H. King, Sr.).
  - c. The pride of life. This is big! It can refer to so much. It refers to pride in achievements, possessions, status, and looks without reference to God; it leads to boasting and arrogance; parading oneself and wanting to impress people, to be noticed, and admired by others. The pride of life keeps people from serving God as it did in Jesus’ time (John 5:44).

**The Lust Of The Flesh, The Lust Of The Eyes, And The Pride Of Life.**

Eve was tempted in these three ways in the garden (Genesis 3:1-7).

Jesus was tempted in these three ways in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11).

We are tempted in these three ways in every place throughout our lives.

## II. Worldliness Prevents Maturity

As the thorns choke the good plant, worldly concerns choke our spiritual lives.

“Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:14).



1. In the parable of the sower, there are five places where the seed fell, and here (Luke 8:14) we encounter that which fell among the thorns. This person actually does much better than the first three, but, obviously, not as well as the fifth. This person is overtaken by a worldly mindset. True, we have to be concerned about food, clothing, and shelter, but here we are talking about someone that is overly anxious about these things and not content with what he has.
2. A Christian is to “seek first the kingdom of God”. The pursuit of things pertaining to God’s kingdom must take first place in our lives, and when we do so, we are promised the supply of temporal blessings. This involves putting our complete trust in God (Proverbs 3:5). It means learning to be content with the lot that God has apportioned to us (Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:7-8).

“Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches - feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, Who is Yahweh? Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:8-9).

<sup>1</sup> Albert Barnes (December 1, 1798 – December 24, 1870) was an American theologian, born in Rome, New York. He graduated from Hamilton College, Clinton, New York, in 1820, and from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1823. Barnes was ordained as a Presbyterian minister by the presbytery of Elizabethtown, New Jersey, in 1825, and was the pastor successively of the Presbyterian Church in Morristown, New Jersey (1825–1830), and of the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia (1830–1868). Barnes is best known for his extensive Bible commentary and notes on the Old and New Testaments, published in a total of 14 volumes in the 1830's.

3. If we are to avoid being choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, then it is essential to guard the heart. Solomon wrote, “Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). Much could be said about this but space prohibits; so let us suffice to say that it involves (i) Putting on the whole armor of God and (ii) identifying the seven avenues through which Satan maintains his sway over the whole world and coming out from them.

### III. Any Christian Can Be Drawn Back Into The World

There comes a time when, through the call of the gospel, we must abandon the world and its sinful pleasures and choose to suffer affliction with the people of God. But we must come out of the world completely or we will be drawn back into it.

“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward” (Hebrews 11:24-26).



1. There are many things from which we derive great pleasure, and while some take pleasure in good things (Psalms 111:2), some take pleasure in wicked things (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12; 2 Peter 2:13). A Christian, like Moses, has chosen to “suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:24-26).
2. However, if we refuse to completely separate ourselves from the world (1 John 2:15-16; James 4:4) and guard our hearts (Proverbs 4:23), then we become easy prey for Satan (cp. 1 Peter 5:8). If a Christian still has one foot in the world, it is enough for Satan to regain his sway (1 John 5:19).
  - a. If one is not wholly committed to Christ and unwilling to lay down his life for the Lord, then he becomes prey for the Tempter. This was Paul’s concern for the brethren at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:4-5).
  - b. Paul said, “Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica - Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia” (2 Timothy 4:9-10). As we have seen loving the world is not a good thing. Preaching the gospel often resulted in persecution and great danger to one’s life, and it seems both John Mark (Acts 13:13 < 15:37) and Demas forsook Paul for the same reason – fear! They were not willing to die because they were too attached to this life. It seems that John Mark repented because Paul later requested his presence (2 Timothy 4:11), but we don’t know what became of Demas. A Christian must be willing hate his own life!

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26).

“He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25).

Come out of the world. Stay out of the world. Pursue holiness.
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- c. Paul contrast two types of widow: the one “trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day” (1 Timothy 5:6), and the other “lives in pleasure” (1 Timothy 5:6). The former was a faithful Christian before she was widowed and she is faithful now that her circumstances have changed. Satan likely tempted her to live in pleasure, but he failed. The latter may have been a faithful Christian before she was widowed, but Satan was successful in tempting her to live in pleasure after the change in her circumstances. The former kept her focus on things above (Colossians 3:2), the latter lost that focus. Note also: younger widows were not to be receive church support because of the temptation to cast off their first faith (1 Timothy 5:11-13).
3. It is not enough to forsake old pursuits, we must adopt new pursuits. The scriptures set forth many things we ought to pursue using terms like *pursue* (Romans 14:19 <sup>NKJV</sup>), *follow after* (1 Timothy 6:11 <sup>AKJV</sup>).

a. The following verses reveal what a Christian ought to pursue<sup>2</sup>.

“Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalms 34:14).

“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11).

“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

b. It is essential to seek holiness because without such no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). This is why it is so vital to keep ourselves separate from the world: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). A Christian has been separated unto God and sanctification refers to the course of life befitting those so separated. But sanctification is an ongoing process, which is what we mean by pursuing holiness.

c. Pursuing holiness involves separating one’s self from the seven avenues through which Satan maintains his sway over the world, guarding the heart, setting one’s mind on things above, and doing all that one can to promote the kingdom of God.

#### The Law Of Displacement

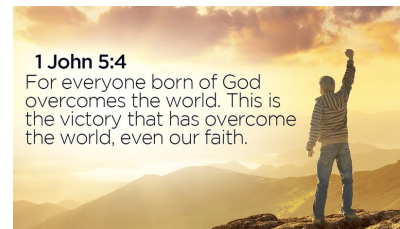
The basic idea: if you insert one thing into a space or even the mind, you exclude the alternative. You have chosen one and not the other. The other is displaced.

Speaking spiritually: if you choose to pursue evil, then the pursuit of good things is displaced. Likewise, if you choose to pursue good things, then the pursuit of evil things is displaced.

#### IV. Overcoming Worldliness

There are many things we could say about overcoming worldliness but space does not permit. Instead, we shall focus on one thing – the mind. It is on what we set our minds that determines our attitudes.

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit” (Romans 8:5).



#### 1 John 5:4

For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

1. Guard your heart: Solomon wrote, “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (Proverbs 4:23<sup>NLT</sup>). One way of guarding the heart is to make sure we set guards over the two main portals: the eyes and the ears; allowing in what is good (Colossians 3:16) and turning away what is bad (Psalms 101:3). What we allow to fill and dominate our thoughts will eventually find outward expression (Proverbs 23:7; Matthew 7:20-23).

“Look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you” (Ezekiel 40:4).

2. Maintain your focus: Paul said, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8). It is essential to keep our focus on things above (Colossians 3:2).

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [who by faith have testified to the truth of God’s absolute faithfulness], stripping off every unnecessary weight and the sin which so easily and cleverly entangles us, let us run with endurance and active persistence the race that is set before us, [looking away from all that will distract us and] **focusing our eyes on Jesus**, who is the Author and Perfector of faith [the first incentive for our belief and the One who brings our faith to maturity], who for the joy [of accomplishing the goal] set before Him endured the cross, disregarding the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God [revealing His deity, His authority, and the completion of His work]” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit” (Romans 8:5).

<sup>2</sup> It is easy to say that we are pursuing things like love, righteousness, and holiness, but if we cannot define the terms and explain exactly *how* we are pursuing them, then it is extremely unlikely that we are actually pursuing them.

3. Practice righteousness: the proof that one is guarding the heart and maintaining their focus on things above is the fruit – the practice of righteousness.

“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him” (1 John 2:29).

“Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (1 John 3:7).

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith” (1 John 5:4).

## Conclusion

“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning” (2 Peter 2:20).

1. John tells us not to love the world or the things in the world – The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). Satan has sway over the whole world (1 John 5:19), influencing and encouraging people’s lives according to their pride and lusts. Satan stirs up pride and lusts through seven avenues, and one of those major avenues is the media. The media can be a source of evil and godlessness, but there is some good spiritual content; if only we would look for it.

“Adulterers and adulteresses! **Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?** Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4).

2. Some brethren that have escaped the pollutions of the world (2 Peter 2:20) find themselves being lured back into the world: listening to ungodly music, watching ungodly movies and programs, and reading ungodly literature. It is through these things that Satan promotes worldly principles and influences our thoughts; they distract a Christian from the pursuit of godliness, righteousness, and holiness. If they do not learn to guard their hearts (Proverbs 4:23), they will wax worse and worse. To think that one can have one foot in Christ and one foot in the world will prove to be a fatal mistake. Worldly pursuit will distract your focus and choke out the word (Luke 8:14).
3. Any Christian can be drawn back into the world, and that happens when we lose our focus. It is essential to keep one’s mind set on things above (Colossians 3:2) and continue pursuing holiness (Hebrews 12:14).
4. There are many steps we can take to overcome worldliness, and we have considered just three: Guard your heart (Proverbs 4:23), maintain your focus (Colossians 3:2), and practice righteousness (1 John 2:29).
5. The single most essential thing we can do to avoid worldliness is to focus all our being on striving to be conformed to the image of Christ.

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29).

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