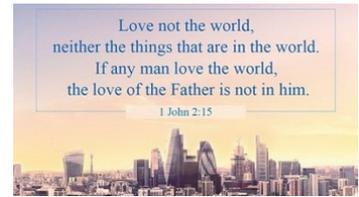


## PERCEIVING AND OVERCOMING WORLDLINESS

### Introduction

1. The majority of people are worldly (**Matthew 7:13-14**) and some in the Lord's church have worldly attitudes, too (worldliness or carnality was a particular problem in the church at Corinth – **1 Corinthians 3:1-3**), which they have failed to shake off since obeying the gospel.
2. Some of the major reasons that worldly attitudes persist are due to:
  - a. A failure to maintain a relationship with God through conversation: speaking to God in prayer (**1 Thessalonians 5:17; Colossians 4:2**) and God speaking to us through His word (**1 Peter 2:1-3**).
  - b. A failure to put on Christ (**Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14**).
  - c. A failure to guard the heart (**Proverbs 23:7**) and pursue holiness<sup>1</sup> (**Hebrews 12:14**).
3. The major objectives of this lesson are to (i) define "worldliness", (ii) determine how we can perceive worldliness in our lives, and (iii) offer some guidelines in overcoming worldly attitudes.



### 1. A brief definition of worldliness.

"Worldliness is a system, an ethical and philosophical edifice erected in opposition to God and His revelation" (What is Worldliness? Banner Of Truth<sup>2</sup>).

Basically, worldliness is anything that is in opposition to God and His revelation.

"Worldliness embraces that which is devilish and seductive; it has to do with matters that are obstacles to the service of God, and in many cases, lure men away from interest in Christ altogether" (see Thayer).

"'Ungodliness' (asebeia) is that which stands in opposition to what is 'godly' (see 1 Timothy 1:9; 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:16). It is anti-religious, anti-God in nature. 'Worldly' (kosmikos) is a moral and religious sphere of evil that captivates the minds of those who have no interest in honoring God" (Wayne Jackson<sup>3</sup>).

### 2. Christians are called by God out of the world.

- a. John says, "We know that we are of God, and **the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one**<sup>4</sup>" (**1 John 5:19**). This *sway* is maintained through **seven avenues**<sup>5</sup> (e.g., the media, the public education system).
- b. **Christians have been called out of the world** [i.e., to separate from worldly influences] (**2 Corinthians 6:17-18**) and must not allow themselves to be conformed to the world [don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mould] (**Romans 12:1-2**).
- c. Once we come out of the world, **we must continue to keep on keeping ourselves unspotted from the world** (**James 1:27**). The world is a source of continual defilement. While we have been taken out of the world, we are still liable to be enticed and polluted by it, and we must, therefore, keep or guard ourselves for fear of such pollution (**cp. 1 Timothy 5:22**).

Coming out of the world means separating ourselves from every avenue through which Satan seeks to shape our thinking and attitudes.

<sup>1</sup> While many will agree that we must pursue holiness, a surprising number of brethren don't know *how* to do so.

<sup>2</sup> <https://banneroftruth.org/uk/resources/articles/2002/what-is-worldliness/>

<sup>3</sup> [www.christiancourier.com/articles/1376-what-is-worldliness](http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1376-what-is-worldliness)

<sup>4</sup> A Christian knows two things (i) we know that we are of God, and (ii) we know the whole world lies under the sway of Satan. It is implied, then, that one who is of God cannot be of the world; he must be separate from the world.

<sup>5</sup> A sincere Christian will study to discover all the avenues through which Satan maintains his sway over the whole world and separate himself from them. Many don't bother, though, due to either complacency or apathy.

### 3. Perceiving worldly attitudes.

- a. Revelation. The scriptures reveal what is good and evil – explicitly (e.g., lying – **Colossians 3:9**) or in principle (e.g., gambling<sup>6</sup> – **1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 10:24**). The more we read and study, the more we will grow in our understanding of good and evil (**Hebrews 5:14**). We can begin by studying passages that list obvious evils (e.g., **1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-9**).

**To not care what the scriptures have to say is to exhibit a worldly attitude.**

- b. Identity. The Lord said that we are lights in the world (**Matthew 5:14; Philippians 2:15**), and so we don't want to do anything that even *appears* contrary to the fact (**1 Thessalonians 5:22**). In other words, we ought to be concerned how others perceive our behavior. For example, Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding the eating of meats offered to idols: an unbeliever may invite you over for a meal and set before you meat that has been offered to an idol. If he doesn't say anything about it, then eat. "But if anyone says to you, This was offered to idols, do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake... Conscience, I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience?" (**1 Corinthians 10:28-29**).

**To not care what others think is to exhibit a worldly attitude.**

- c. Doubt. There are times when doubts arise in our minds: should I be celebrating Easter? Should I be gambling? Would it be okay to have just one (alcoholic) drink? Should I be watching this movie? (cp. **Romans 14:13-23**). The rule is: if your conscience bothers you, even in the slightest, then don't do it (**Romans 14:21-23**).

**To ignore one's conscience is to exhibit a worldly attitude.**

- d. Influence. Whether intentionally or unintentionally we set an example to others, and we influence those around us. A sincere Christian desires to influence others only for good (**1 Corinthians 9:19-23**), but we can influence others for evil when we do something sinful ourselves or even doing something that is not evil!

- 1) David's adultery with Bathsheba had an influence on the enemies of Yahweh in giving them occasion to blaspheme (**1 Samuel 12:14**).
- 2) Queen Vashti disobeyed the king's command and there was a great concern that her behavior would influence all the women to despise their husbands (**Esther 1:10-17**).
- 3) Paul was concerned that those brethren that were going to idol's temples and eating meat offered to idols would influence brethren to go against their conscience and do the same (**1 Corinthians 8:1-13**).

**To not care about the influence one has on others is to exhibit a worldly attitude.**

- e. Self-control. Paul tells us that "the desires of the flesh are opposed to the Spirit, and the [desires of the] Spirit are opposed to the flesh; for these are antagonistic to each other [continually withstanding and in conflict with each other]..." (**Galatians 5:17**). In view of the great and precious promises we have in Christ, Peter exhorts Christians, saying, "adding your diligence [to the divine promises], employ every effort in exercising your faith to develop virtue (excellence, resolution, Christian energy), and in [exercising] virtue [develop] knowledge (intelligence), and in [exercising] knowledge [develop] self-control..." (**2 Peter 1:5-6**).

- 1) We must exercise self-control over our thoughts, words, and deeds because all these can stir up inordinate fleshly appetites. For example: (i) how foolish would it be to go to the home of someone who is known to be contentious and argumentative (**Psalms 26:5; cp. 2 Timothy 2:23; 1 Corinthians 5:11**)? And (ii) how foolish would it be to watch a movie that contains nudity (**Job 31:1; Psalms 101:3**)? In both situations you may lose control!
- 2) Remember: "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (**Galatians 5:24**). To maintain self-control, Paul says, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (**Galatians 5:16**).

**To deliberately put ourselves in situations in which we are likely to lose control is to exhibit a worldly attitude.**

<sup>6</sup> See article "Where Does The Bible Condemn Gambling?" by Wayne Jackson. [www.christiancourier.com/articles/1580-where-does-the-bible-condemn-gambling](http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1580-where-does-the-bible-condemn-gambling)

f. Association. Luke said, “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44). It is natural to associate with others that are of the same mind as us and avoid those with whom we don’t have anything in common (Psalms 26:5; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

- 1) When we come together, it is an opportunity to edify (cp. Romans 15:2; 1 Corinthians 14:26), encourage, and provoke one another unto love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25).
- 2) Those with whom we associate will influence our thinking, speech, and behavior either for good or ill. Solomon wrote, “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20). Paul said, “Do not be deceived: evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Corinthians 15:33; cp. Psalms 26:4-5). If we choose the wrong people with whom to associate, they will lead us astray (Proverbs 12:26).

**To desire to associate with worldly people is to exhibit a worldly attitude.**

#### 4. Overcoming worldliness.

- a. Maintain your relationship with God<sup>7</sup>. A Christian cannot expect to overcome worldliness unless he maintains his relationship with God. We maintain our relationship with God through conversation: we speak to God through prayer and God speaks to us through His word. It is essential to devote yourself to prayer (Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17) and studying (1 Peter 2:1-3).
- b. Walk in the Spirit. Part of a Christian’s relationship with God is walking in obedience to His commandments (John 14:15, 21; Luke 6:46). We can read and study as much as we like, but unless we apply or obey that knowledge (wisdom), then we don’t have a relationship with God (1 John 2:3-4; James 1:23-25; Romans 2:13). Keeping God’s commandments is what it means to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25).
- c. Guard your heart. All our thoughts, attitudes, speech, and behavior are the result of what is in our heart (Proverbs 23:7; Matthew 15:19). It is obvious, then, that whoever controls our thoughts controls our speech and behavior. Some of the more salient ways of guarding the heart are:
  - 1) Devoting yourself to listening to the voice of the Spirit (i.e., studying the scriptures); it will renew your mind (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23) and keep your heart pure (Psalms 119:9, 11, 67, 105).
  - 2) Focus your thoughts on things above (Colossians 3:2; Philippians 4:8; cp. Romans 12:16; Philippians 3:19).
  - 3) Where it is in your power, avoid all kinds of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22; Psalms 101:3; 119:37).
- d. Associate with your brethren. If we had to completely withdraw from ungodly people, then we would have to go and live a life of isolation in a monastery or leave this world altogether! (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). So, of course, we do have to live among and work with ungodly people. This is necessary if we are to preach the gospel (Mark 16:15-16) and be lights in the world (Matthew 5:14; Philippians 2:15). However, a sincere Christian will not desire to spend an inordinate amount of time with the ungodly because (i) he desires to spend time with his brethren (Acts 2:44; Psalms 133:1), (ii) he doesn’t have anything in common with the ungodly (2 Corinthians 6:14-18), and (iii) he knows that “evil company corrupts good habits<sup>8</sup>” (1 Corinthians 15:33; cp. Psalms 26:4-5; Proverbs 12:26).
- e. Exercise self-control. Whatever steps we take to overcome worldliness – putting on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:8), guarding our hearts (Proverbs 23:7), etc. – we will always be tempted (1 Peter 5:8), which means we will always be responsible to exercise self-control over our thoughts (2 Corinthians 10:5), words (Psalms 39:1), and deeds (1 Corinthians 9:25-27).

Every relationship begins with a conversation and is maintained through conversation.

<sup>7</sup> “Every relationship begins with a conversation and is maintained through conversation. We maintain our relationship with God through conversation: we speak to God through prayer and God speaks to us through His word. It is essential, then, to devote ourselves to prayer (Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17) and studying (1 Peter 2:1-3). If you are not devoted to prayer and studying, then you don’t have a relationship with God; despite what you may feel or believe” (1000 Nuggets Of Truth And Wisdom, Vol. 5, #98).

<sup>8</sup> It is often those that deny this truth that have already been corrupted to some degree.

## Conclusion

1. Basically, worldliness is anything that is in opposition to God and His word. The majority of people can be described as “worldly” and, unfortunately, there are a number of Christians that have failed to mature and that remain worldly minded.
2. The aim of a sincere Christian is to please the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:9), but this is not possible with worldly attitudes (Romans 8:8; Hebrews 11:6). So we need to examine our ways (Lamentations 3:40) from time-to-time, and this is what we have done in this lesson.
  - a. To not care what the scriptures have to say is to exhibit a worldly attitude.
  - b. To not care what others think is to exhibit a worldly attitude.
  - c. To ignore one’s conscience is to exhibit a worldly attitude.
  - d. To not care about the influence one has on others is to exhibit a worldly attitude.
  - e. To deliberately put ourselves in situations in which we are likely to lose control is to exhibit a worldly attitude.
  - f. To desire to associate with worldly people is to exhibit a worldly attitude.
3. Overcoming worldliness is a matter of adopting the opposite of the attitudes above. Generally, though, it is essential to:
  - a. Maintain your relationship with God.
  - b. Walk in the Spirit.
  - c. Guard your heart.
  - d. Associate with your brethren.
  - e. Exercise self-control.

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