

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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“In the World, but Not of the World”

In part of Jesus' prayer of **John 17**, He said, *“I pray not that you would take them from the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one”* (**verse 15**). This is one of the passages that teaches the principle that Christ's disciples should be “in the world, but not of the world.” Consider some things Scripture teaches related to this theme.

Being “in the world” involves living among and coming into contact with worldly people. God's warning that *“evil companionships corrupt good morals”* (**1 Cor. 15:33**) must be taken seriously. This warning does not imply, though, that God expects us to cut ourselves off *completely* from those of the world.

This principal is inferred in **1 Corinthians 5**. In this chapter, the Holy Spirit through Paul gave instruction related to church discipline. Notice the clarification concerning who this applies to in **verses 9-10**: *I wrote unto you in my epistle to have no company with fornicators; not at all meaning with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous and extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world:*

The phrase *“for then must ye needs go out of the world”* alludes to the fact that we cannot realistically withdraw from all who are of the world. We, like those who **John 17:15** directly applied to, have responsibilities as we live on earth, and we cannot fulfill our duties by cutting ourselves off from society. Part of living on earth involves coming into contact with people who are in sin.

Though we must be “in the world,” we can choose to not be “of the world.” That is, we can choose to follow *God's* pattern for our lives instead of conforming to the pattern of the world (**Rom. 12:2**). God's children have this opportunity, regardless of how sinful the world around us may be.

Lot's life in Sodom well exemplifies this. When God punished Sodom and Gomorrah for unrighteousness, He *“delivered righteous Lot, who was very distressed by the lustful life of the wicked (for that righteous man dwelling among them was tormented in his righteous soul from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds)”* (**2 Pet. 2:7-8**).

Wickedness is nothing new. Biblical history shows many of God's children living amid unrighteousness that was just as severe, if not more so, than that which surrounds us today. Lot and others demonstrate that we can be righteous even *“in the middle of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you are seen as lights in the world”* (**Phil. 2:15**). When we do so, we can be a *positive* influence on those in sin, instead of allowing the *world* to *negatively* influence us.

To be set apart in this way, we must allow God to transform our *thinking*.

Notice **Romans 12:2**: *Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.* It is easy to unwittingly allow society to shape and mold us into one who conforms to “majority opinion.” God teaches that we must instead go through a spiritual metamorphosis process, changing our minds to fit *His* will.

This is done by looking to God's Word as our standard in life. There are many "*who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter*" (Isa. 5:20), but don't perceive themselves this way because they compare their beliefs and practices to the world instead of God's Word.

Those who are "in the world, but not of the world" allow God to tell us what is right and wrong, and develop an abhorrence for what God declares evil and a love for what He declares right (Rom. 12:9). This change of thinking should lead to a change of *practice*, thus allowing God's truth to mold us for His glory and set us apart from sin (John 17:17).

When we change our beliefs and practices in harmony with God's will, we will be *different* from the world. While many want to "fit in" with the majority, we should remember that "*many*" are headed down the "*broad*" way "*that leads to destruction*," (Matt. 7:13), while "*few*" are headed down the "*narrow*" way "*that leads to life*" (verse 14). Instead of viewing the differences that result from godliness *negatively*, we should realize such differences are *good*.

Notice 1 Peter 4:3-4: *For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:*

Verse 4 references the negative perception those of the world have when we escape the entanglements of sin. While their evil speaking can be upsetting, it is a wonderful thing when one leaves behind sins such as

those mentioned in **verse 3**. The fact that some find these changes strange is a light thing relative to the *joy* of escaping the snares of sin.

The evil speaking of **verse 4** exemplifies the fact that those who are "in the world, but not of the world" face tribulations as a result. Though transforming our lives to fit God's will is a *positive* change, there are *temporary* hardships that can be expected. In fact, God *guarantees* "*all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*" (2 Tim. 3:12).

Such persecution may be physical or *mental* (like that of 1 Pet. 4:4). It may come from a family member (Matt. 10:35-36), or close friend. We must be prepared to endure persecution, determining that we will put Christ's will for us above all (verses 37-38).

Endurance through trials calls for *trusting* our Almighty God. When the apostle Paul reflected on rejections he faced for the truth (2 Tim. 4:16), he said "*the Lord stood by me and strengthened me*" (verse 17). If "*our citizenship is in heaven*" (Phil. 3:20), we need not fear the trials we face during our brief time on earth, but should trust our King who is in heaven, casting our cares on Him (Phil. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:7), and looking to the time we will be with Him forever.

Addressing Christians, the apostle Peter said "*you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*" (1 Pet. 2:9). May we heed this truth and be "in the world, but not of the world," allowing God to transform our lives for His glory.

- Michael Hickox