

# LOVE NOT THE WORLD,

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I John 2:15-17

LOVE NOT THE WORLD

Foundations

Review

# What will we study?

Definition of “the world” in its evil sense

A short biblical definition:

*The totality of unregenerate persons living on the earth within some period of time, along with the habitual patterns of thought and behavior by which they express their ignorance of and insubordination to God.*

A simple, more functional definition:

*“The bad part of culture” (John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*).*

**The world: “The bad part of culture”**

**Culture:** General patterns of thinking and behavior, both good and bad.

**The world:** Ungodly thinking and behavior, all bad.

**Pop Culture:** Media-driven culture; more bad than good.

A Venn diagram illustrating the relationship between three concepts: Culture, Pop Culture, and The World. The diagram consists of three overlapping rounded rectangles. The largest rectangle is labeled 'Culture'. Inside it, there are two smaller rectangles: one labeled 'The World' and one labeled 'Pop Culture'. The 'The World' rectangle is positioned at the bottom left, and the 'Pop Culture' rectangle is positioned at the top right. They overlap each other and both overlap with the larger 'Culture' rectangle.

Culture

Pop Culture

The World

# Why study “the world”?

1. Because the Bible makes a big deal of this topic.
  - Love not the world (1 John 2:15).
  - Be not conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2).
  - Friendship with the world is hostility toward God (Jam. 4:4).
  - True religion is . . . to keep himself unspotted from the world (Jam. 1:27).
2. Because much is at stake.
3. Because the world’s power appears to be increasing.
4. Because we love God.

# What do we hope to accomplish?

The objective is not

comprehensive

academic

The objective is

spiritual fruitfulness

growth in personal discipleship

equipping for warfare

in our lives personally

in the lives of those committed to our care

# What are the conditions for success?

Honesty with ourselves before the Lord

Humility before the Lord

Desire to learn of our failures before the Lord

Willingness to accept correction from the Lord

Willingness to pursue change through the Lord's power

Willingness to persevere, through the Lord's power, in mortal combat with the world, the flesh, and the devil

## Coming up:

January 13: Core Biblical teachings

January 20: Application to current issues

January 27: Overcoming

Review



LOVE NOT THE WORLD

Core Biblical Teachings

# Old Testament Roots

1. Key term is not “the world” but “the nations.”
  - God divides and scatters the nations across the earth.
  - God promises to make Abraham a special nation through which He will bless all nations.
  - As the OT develops, Israel becomes
    - God’s special people
    - Bound to Him by covenant.

This is in contrast to the nations who do not know God, worship idols, and practice all manner of evil.

# Old Testament Roots

2. Israel's relationship to the nations develops as a fascinating theme.
  - God miraculously forms Israel as a people.
  - God miraculously delivers Israel from Egyptian captivity, establishing her as a nation.
  - God appoints Israel to a priestly function among the nations.
  - Her success in this role is conditioned on her obedience to God's commands and faithfulness to His covenant.
  - She pledges herself to such obedience and faithfulness.
  - She succeeds only to a limited extent, imitating the nations instead.
  - She actually corrupts herself worse than the nations.
  - God sends her back into captivity among the nations.
  - God promises to redeem her from captivity among the nations.

# Old Testament Roots

3. Israel's unique relationship to God is summarized in this often-repeated language:

“I will be your God, and you will be my people.”

# New Testament Development

1. The “God/people” language carries over to the New Testament.
2. God’s saving work in the NT significantly parallels the OT.
  - God delivers His people from captivity to sin.
  - God appoints His people as witnesses to the unregenerate world.
  - Our success in this role is conditioned on our obedience to God’s commands and faithfulness to His New Covenant with us.
  - The church often fails in this role, imitating unbelievers instead.
  - Believers sometimes corrupt themselves worse than unbelievers.
  - God chastens His worldly people.
  - God promises ultimately to “purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

# New Testament Development

3. But now God's people includes "the nations" (= "the gentiles").
4. Therefore, "the nations (gentiles)" is no longer an appropriate word for those who do not know God.
5. The NT terminology entails two words:
  - κόσμος (*cosmos*) — "world," often stressing the people or the place.
  - αἰών (*aion/eon*) — "age," often stressing the period of time.
  - The two are often used synonymously: "The bad part of culture."
6. The NT commands regarding the world are simply extensions of God's commands to Israel to be holy as He is holy and not to imitate the nations.
7. Thus the whole Bible insists on this teaching: "Love not the world!"

# Our Big Challenge

How do we know which aspects of our culture are “the world” to which we must not conform?



How do we reliably locate this boundary?

# Our Big Challenge

1. Numerous passages of Scripture help us by listing or describing
  - sins that characterize the unregenerate
  - pre-conversion sins that believers are to renounce
  - virtues that believers are to pursue.



# Our Big Challenge

2. Some believe that issues not explicitly mentioned in such passages are matters of individual Christian liberty (Sola Scriptura!).

But:

- Some of these passages include wording like “such things,” requiring us to expand.
- 1 John 2:16 provides Scripture’s definitive description of the boundary, and it is very general:
  - The lust of the flesh
  - The lust of the eyes
  - The pride of life
- Many Scripture passages require the believer to exercise mature discernment.

# Our Big Challenge

3. One reason discernment is required is that
  - cultures are always changing;
  - therefore, the boundaries of worldliness are always changing,
  - and no simple formula can reliably diagnose worldliness.

# Our Big Challenge

4. A key point of the New Testament description of the world (mainly in John's writings) can help us discern its presence and influence.
  - The world does not know God.
  - The world opposes the knowledge of God.
  - Keep in mind that true knowledge of God is full knowledge of God.
  - The world is often quite content with partial or inaccurate knowledge of God (note Psalm 50:21—God in man's image!).
  - The world is not always belligerently hostile to God; often it simply ignores Him.

# Our Big Challenge

5. Some key diagnostic questions when evaluating a feature of culture for worldliness revolve around the issue of knowing God:
  - Does this thing reflect ignorance of God's true character?  
Would my culture do this thing if we really knew God as He is?
  - Is this thing something that our culture uses to suppress the knowledge of God as He really is?
  - Will this thing help or hinder my own growth in knowing God?
  - Will this thing help or hinder my ability to make God known to others as He really is?

# Our Big Challenge

6. Our ability to discern absolutely depends upon our setting aside personal preference and self-interest in pursuit of accurate assessment of moral character (Phil. 1:9-11).
  - Glorifying God requires the fruit of righteousness.
  - Righteousness requires sincerity and blamelessness.
  - Sincerity and blamelessness require preference for the excellent.
  - Preference for the excellent requires knowledge and discernment.
  - Love (a self-giving disposition to serve the true interests others) is the starting point of the whole process.
  - Whether I like or dislike an aspect of my culture has no bearing whatsoever on the question of whether or not it is worldly.

# Summary

1. Biblical teaching about the world and worldliness begins with OT teaching about Israel's relationship with the nations.
2. The NT extends that teaching to believers of the church age.
3. Both Testaments assure us that the ultimate destiny of God's people is deliverance from, not conformity to, the world.
4. Our big challenge is to discern the boundaries of worldliness accurately amid ever-changing culture.
  - Scripture deals explicitly with many issues.
  - Scripture leaves many issues to mature discernment.
  - The world's opposition to the knowledge of God provides a valuable diagnostic key.
  - Mature discernment is impossible apart from selfless love.

## Coming up:

January 20: Application to current issues

January 27: Overcoming

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