

The Christian and the World

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THE true Christian is one who has had a work of grace wrought in his heart by the Holy Spirit. All true religion is supernatural and has not an earthly origin. The work of grace has neither been begun nor is it carried on by man-- it is of a heavenly origin and is spiritual in its nature, for while believers are called upon to work out their own salvation, they are immediately reminded that it is God who works in them both to will and do of His good pleasure (Phil. ii. 12, 13). The clearly marked distinction between the "natural" and the "spiritual" man is emphasised by the Apostle when in writing to the Corinthians he says: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are *foolishness* unto him, neither *can he know them* for they are spiritually discerned" (I. Cor. ii. 14). It was failure to understand the background that lay behind the two classes between the "natural" man and the "spiritual" man that caused all the trouble in the Corinthian Church and it is the same reason which is at work in our day causing so much trouble in the professing Church. The things of the Spirit of God can never be received by the "natural man" however well-trained he may be and however well instructed he may be in religious matters. People may try to shut their eyes to the distinction but there it is. No training nor natural gifts can ever take the place of the works of the Holy Ghost. We need not be surprised, therefore, at natural men regarding the things of the Spirit of God as foolishness. They can do nothing else while in an unregenerate state. They may not be open mockers and scoffers, they may professedly accept the truths of revelation, be diligent in their attendance at the means of grace but if not born again they cannot know the things of the Spirit of God for these are spiritually discerned. No words could more sharply direct our attention to the distinction drawn between all that goes under the name of religion that is of an earthly origin and that which is of a heavenly. The change from a state of nature to a state of grace is spoken of by the Apostle Paul as a "translation" out of one kingdom into another- "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. i. 13). This change was wrought by omnipotent power-the exceeding greatness of God's power. It is a change so deep and far reaching that all things become new. The things that once held them captive have now wholly or to a great extent lost their power over them. Their whole outlook is

changed and they have now entered on new activities. Such was the Apostle Paul's own experience. When he opened his eyes after his conversion all things were changed in his view-time, eternity, his blamelessness concerning the law, his view of the world: - its pleasures, its prizes, its honours, etc. And in his own words the world was crucified unto him and he unto the world by the Lord Jesus Christ. Now a careful study of the New Testament will bring us face to face with an array of texts pointing out the evil nature of "the world" and warning the Christian against it. Some of these may be quoted- "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James I. 27); "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God 'I Whosoever; therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James iv. 4); "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1. John ii. 15-17); "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not" (1. John iii. 1); "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (1. John iii. 13); "They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us" (1. John iv. 4, 5); "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God~" (1. John v. 4, 5). This is the world of which the Apostle says that believers in their unregenerate state walked according to (Eph. ii. 2) and against whose rulers they wrestle (Eph. vi. 12) and from which they have been delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. i. 4). It would require a small treatise to discuss the various usages of this term "the world" as we have it in the New Testament. Here we are only referring to one aspect of it. What then is this "world" of which so much is said and against which Christians are warned? It cannot be altogether material things for they are to use these though not abusing them and it is only so far as the heart is inordinately set upon them that they come under "the world" in the sense referred to in the quoted passages. The "world" may be in the heart while one may not have more than a few coppers in the pocket. It is evident that "the world" in the above quoted passages has a moral significance. Generally

speaking it may be taken to mean that whole organized system of things with its allurements, practices and laws, alien to and opposed to the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ and which has Satan for its God. Its life and the sphere of its activities are "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" and while it includes what we usually call worldliness it embraces a great deal more. 1. This "world" has a spirit of its own which is antagonistic to the Spirit of God (1. Cor. ii. 12). 2. A wisdom of its own which is foolishness with God (1. Cor. i. 20, 21). 3. A sorrow of its own which is opposite in character and effect to godly sorrow (11. Cor. vii. 10). 4. Its moral life is governed by the prince of the power of the air (Eph. ii. 12). 5. It lies under the dominion of powers hostile to man (Col. ii. 8, 20; Gal. iv. 3). 6. The Christian is redeemed from it and inwardly no longer belongs to it. This is "the world" which believers are called upon not to love. Its opinions, sentiments and influences, are definitely antagonistic to Christ's Church and His people. That its hatred is at times dormant gives no reason that it is now gone. Quiescence does not mean absolute cessation any more than that the dormancy of the adder in winter implies that its poison is inactive. Its hatred to-day is as great as when the disciples went forth as sheep among wolves though its 'activities may be dormant in one direction until some circumstance calls it forth and then it puts its poison fangs into the cause of Christ and its action is hailed with the mocking laughter of the ungodly throughout the land. Let God's people be under no delusion that the world is still the enemy of Christ and let them not be overcome with dismay when it strikes but let them be of good cheer for He has overcome the world. As an organized system opposed to Christ it has a master mind behind its manifold activities throughout the wide sphere of its operations. It is not aiming its blows at the same time nor the same place neither is the manner of delivering them the same along the long stretched out battlefield but there is a common objective and that is the destruction of the cause of Christ. So let there be no mistake about it, he who is the friend of the world is the enemy of God (James iv. 4). His verdict on matters pertaining to Christ's cause is the verdict of an enemy even when professing to be a friend. If it shows favour to Christ's cause its professed friendship is like the kiss of Judas. The world has laws and rules of its own contrary to those which Christ has given to His Church. The world says that a multitude is required to promote and carry on a cause; Christ says where two or three are there He is in the midst of them. The world says that great numbers are required to carry on a conflict to a successful issue; the Lord Jesus says without me ye can do

nothing. Wealth, social position, education are essentials for its servants quite independent of grace; grace and heavenly wisdom are essentials for His servants. He took the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and the weak things to confound the things that are mighty; the base things of the world and things which are despised and things which are not to bring to nought the things which are (1. Cor. i. 27-28) so that no man might glory in men. The world would give the glory to man; Christ gave all the glory to God and placed that first in His life and work. But the world never seeks this and neither will any sinful man or woman unless grace is given to them from heaven. The world had its own wisdom and God laid its glory in the dust when after the wisdom of the world it knew not God it pleased Him by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1. Cor. i. 21). He had a purpose in all this, viz.: to destroy the wisdom of the wise and to bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men" (1. Cor. i. 25). The world exercises its tremendous influence through "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life." Let not anyone be deceived in thinking the world is a mere abstraction - it is not so. It is as real in its activities as anything known to man. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life are something very real and very active in their operations and all these are in that world the believer is warned against. He may not love all these or all that is implied in each of them but he may be in danger of coming under the seducing influence of some of them. The Apostle here classifies these desires according to the inward dispositions to which they appeal. To these three the things that are in the world minister. Lust here is to be understood in its wider sense of any desire of a carnal nature. It does not include those lawful desires that God has implanted in man, such as hunger, thirst, etc., except so far as he may leave their lawful spheres and become seducers to evil. The lust of the flesh covers a wide range such gluttony, drunkenness, uncleanness; "the rage for physical or aesthetical excitement which the ball, the theatre, the gaming table, if not worse excesses, must appease" (Principal Candlish) and all sinful pleasures and questionable amusements. 2. The lust of the eyes may mean desires begotten by the eyes but it may also mean the desires that belong to the eyes specially. The eyes may delight in seeing the joys, the ecstasies, and pleasures of the giddy world. We may not indulge in the world's questionable pleasures and vanities yet we may have a secret gratification in seeing them. No doubt Satan makes use of the eyes to awaken many sinful desires in our hearts and hence the Psalmist

prayed that his eyes might be kept from seeing vanity. The pride of life or its vainglory covers again an extensive field - gifts and qualities which may give one a pre-eminence over one's fellows and beget in himself a proud arrogant spirit towards his less fortunate brethren is embraced in the pride of life.

Generally speaking whatever puffs up a man, makes him disdainful of others while self is being sedulously fed and attended to, all this belongs to the pride of life. This is not the law that holds good in Christ's kingdom. Such dispositions are not discouraged simply but condemned as something that is diametrically opposed to one of the rules of His Kingdom.

Let us keep in mind, therefore, that any verdict "the world" may pass upon the Church of Christ is worthless; it is taking to do with things of which it can have no knowledge and concerning which, in the nature of things, it is incapable of giving a just judgment. In doing so it is acting as a busybody and interfering with matters over which it has no jurisdiction and into the merits of which it cannot enter. Let not, therefore, believers be annoyed when they hear its insulting verdicts passed upon them nor be unduly upset when it passes its judgment upon them and their ways-provided always they are walking in the steps of their Master. Neither let them be overcome when it pours out its hatred on them. The Lord's words still hold true – "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. 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 xv. 19). It is not meant by anything said in the foregoing that believers are beyond criticism; all that is asserted is that in spiritual matters the world" is not a competent judge because of its ignorance and its incapacity to know a "spiritual" things.