

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. George Stevens

Called to be holy: Separation from the world

Imagine that you have been suited out with a deep sea diving suit. You have difficulty lifting your feet because of the heavy shoes. Tubes seem to hang everywhere restricting movement. You feel a surge of fear when the helmet is locked on. The weight of it all bears upon you. A sting of panic strikes as you enter the water only to find immediate relief as the burden of heaviness is lifted from you. But why go to all this trouble? Well without the diving suit, the breathing tube, the communication and lifelines and the helmet you would not survive in the cold ocean depths. The seabed is an alien environment to you:

- Without the suit you would suffer under the pressure of the water;
- Without the breathing tube you would be starved of life-giving gas;
- Without the lifeline, those above could not help you should problems arise; and
- Without communication to the ship above, there could be no sharing of information and giving of guidance.

This is exactly the position of the Christian in *"this present evil world"* (see Galatians 1:4). He is a new creature in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and His home environment is now in the heavens (Philippians 3:20). A lifeline of love and righteousness links him to His Lord above. Prayer enables Him to express His needs to His Saviour. The Bible is the means by which the Lord speaks to Him. The weight of truth keeps Him stable in this world which is now alien to him. A world that seeks to destroy his God-given faith.

While praying to His Father, the Lord Jesus said: *"I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me"* (John 17:14-21).

The Lord Jesus is *"the second man, ... the Lord from out of heaven"* (see 1 Corinthians 15:47). He is the heavenly man who ever seeks to glorify God. He is a sinless man and, as such, is not affected by the fads, fashions, aspirations and opinions of this world. It is these worldly characteristics that oppose the will of God. So much so, that it's machinations led to the murder of His beloved Son. Acts 2:23 states: *"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain..."* God in His wisdom knew that His Son would die at the hands of men; but in His foreknowledge had purposed it for the blessing of millions.

We read in Galatians 1:3-4: *"Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father..."* Here we see the death of Christ as an offering for our sins and the deliverance of Christians from this *"evil world"* are indisputably linked. It is through faith in Him and the work He has done that He can say to the Father: *"They are not of [this] world..."* [John 17:14] Our faith separates us from the influences of this world in order that we may please and honour the God who loves us. We know that faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the word of God (see Romans 10:17). Hence, it is no surprise that the manual for Christian growth and conduct is the Word of Truth, the Bible. Guided therein by the Spirit of truth, there is no other authority for Christians today. The church is not subject to the laws of government that flaunt the Holy Scriptures and cause believers to disobey God. Christians are to *"obey God rather than man."* An example of this is found in Acts 5:28-29 where we read of local officials saying to Jesus' disciples: *"... Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."* What was the answer given by Peter and the other apostles? They bravely said, *"We ought to obey God rather than men."*

Today, we increasingly find Christians who wish to obey God being oppressed by governments who think they know better than their Creator. To his credit, Prince Charles some while ago commented with some sadness on the physical persecution of Christians in Pakistan; but is he (and other dignitaries) blind to the fact that persecution is

occurring here in the UK under a different guise and with the support of law. Is it not time for a revival of Christian truth in this land before it becomes totally corrupted by dishonesty, immorality and violence?

It is also clear from John 17:14-21 that the Lord Jesus Christ has sent out His disciples into this world in order to proclaim the truth because there **were those who believed their word** (John 17:20). This responsibility to propagate the truth belongs to Christians today. So what are we doing about it?

In 1 John 2:15-17 we read: *“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.”*

The “world” may be seen as that form of life and government that opposes the rule of God. It is organised and dominated by Satan who is called the *“prince of this world”* (John 14:30). He is also called the “god of this world [or age]” (see 2 Corinthians 4:4) who seeks to divert the worship of men from the living God to himself. He is the one who blinds the eyes of unbelievers to the truth of God.

The love of this world is sometimes called “worldliness”. This is an attitude of friendship toward, a desire for, and a wish to be recognised by the world system. This attitude leads to an indulgence in acts which may ultimately result in sin, but which will always hinder a Christian’s love for God as well as his spiritual growth, and his testimony.

The Apostle John gives all believers a categorical command to continuously avoid loving the world. Any person who willfully makes the things of the world system the centre of his interest and desire exalts the world to a place of idolatry because it takes the place of God. That is to say, the love of the Father is excluded from his life. Anything in this world that displaces God becomes an idol. James 4:4 puts it this way: *“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”* So an **over-occupation** with things like the beauties of nature, of art, of music, or of literature may be classed as idolatry or adultery because it leaves no time for God and His service.

“The things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15-17) can be the source of temptation in three general areas:

1. **“The lust of the flesh”** which is the strong desire that our human nature produces for some kind of pleasure. It is seen in the phrase: “You eat to live! I live to eat!” It is the desire for **self-gratification**.
2. **“The lust of the eyes”** is the strong desire to possess anything beautiful or of value to us. It seeks **self-satisfaction which is covetousness**.
3. **“The pride of life”** is the strong desire for **self-exaltation**. It ever seeks the praise of men.

We need only to turn back to Genesis 3:6 in order to see all these aspects of the world in action. We read: *“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”*

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was out of bounds to Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:16-17). God had told Adam that he must not eat of this particular tree or he would die. From the scripture read, we can see that Adam had passed this information to Eve (Genesis 3:2). However:

- The lust of the eyes overcame her because she saw the tree as being delightful - he was attracted by it.
- The lust of the flesh came in when she saw it was good for food - he desired to taste it.
- The pride of life came in when she thought about the wisdom she would have as a result of eating its fruit - she desired to become greater.

Ignoring the thought of God’s judgment, she ate of the fruit.

The world’s enticement seems irresistible because the devil, who is the power behind the scenes, is the great seducer. The lusts linked with it lead souls down the road of deception to disobedience. It ultimately results in unbelief, fear, sorrow and pain.

In the Old Testament, Egypt is often seen as a general picture of the world system. It was full of delights of various kinds. The children of Israel were God’s people enslaved in the country. Pharaoh represents the devil. Before Israel could worship their God they had to be delivered from Egypt. This was achieved in two ways. Firstly, the judgment upon the firstborn of Egypt from which Israel was protected by the blood of the sacrificed lamb (see Exodus 12). Secondly, the division of the Red Sea which then destroyed Pharaoh and his armies (see Exodus 14). So the children of Israel were delivered both by blood and by power.

The Christian has been delivered from the world by blood and by power as well. Both are seen in the sacrifice of Christ. Returning to Galatians 1:3-4 we read again: *“Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father...”* There we are delivered from sins and from the world by the blood of Christ. In Hebrews 2:14-15 we read of that same sacrifice destroying the devil: *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”*

Now, believers in Christ are free to worship the Father in spirit and truth by the power of the Holy Spirit. However, just like those of the children of Israel who rebelled, Christians may also be marked by unbelief and desire to return to worldly pleasures and pursuits when the storms of life are unleashed. We read the following about Israel's rebels: *“And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes”* (Numbers 11:4-6). These people were not satisfied with God's provision for them so they desired to return to their old way of life. With this desire in their hearts they could not worship the living God. So it is with Christians today. Trusting in Christ we share His reproach and we cannot truly worship God if our hearts prefer the world rather than His presence. Remembering that those things that are loved more than God become idols, then 1 Corinthians 10:21 applies: *“Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.”*

Christ describes the normal relationship of the Christian to the world system in this way: *“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 its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”* (John 15:18-19). We should not expect the unbelieving people of this world to approve of us. If we truly belong to Christ we are likely to be hated - and hated without cause (see John 15:25). But remember, as Christians we are to love our enemies and seek the salvation of unbelievers.

We have lived as a God-fearing nation for a good number of generations in the past and this hatred was dulled as a result. However, today, the nation is no longer God-fearing and we should expect to be hated if we are standing for the name of Christ. Those who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. If you profess to being a Christian and don't feel the resentment of those in the world, then it is questionable whether your life is right before God.

The command to be separate from the world does not mean that a Christian should isolate himself from the rest of society. He does not need to live out his life in a monastery or a convent. Christians are the *“salt of the earth”* (Matthew 5:13). They are responsible to take the word of God into the world. Acts 1:8 states: *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* Therefore, separation from the world should, by no means, discourage earnest efforts to win the people of the world to Christ. God Himself desires the salvation of sinners: *“For God so loved the world [that is, the people of the world], that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16).

Furthermore, separation from the world does not forbid association with non-believers in the course of legitimate daily work. Paul tells the Corinthians that he does not expect them to leave the world in order to avoid contamination with sinners (1 Corinthians 5:9-13). This is in harmony with the prayer of our Lord that believers be kept from the **evil** of the world, not removed from it (John 17:15). Nonetheless, the same verses in Corinthians show us that if a so-called believer in Christ is continuing in a sin such as sexual immorality, then he or she is to be avoided completely until the person has repented and the sin is judged.

This leads us to the separation of Christians from contractual partnerships with unbelievers. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 the Apostle Paul commands believers not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. The contrast between the two is like the difference between light and darkness or between God and idols (2 Corinthians 6:14, 16). Paul is not simply giving good advice - he is declaring the command of the Lord: *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 6:17). He goes on to urge, *“Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Thus the doctrine of separation is grounded in the holiness of God. Christians must be separate from the world because God is separate from all sin. In order to be set apart to God and His purposes, believers must separate themselves from sin and worldliness.

There are several areas where unequal yokes are possible - marriage, business, religion, and philanthropy. Because of a shortage of time we will consider two of them.

The first is the marriage yoke (and I speak to those as yet unmarried). Christians should marry fellow Christians. If they marry an unbeliever, no matter how good his or her character seems to be, they will find themselves restricted spiritually. Furthermore, there may well be ensuing arguments as to how best to raise their children.

Clearly, there is a difference if a person is converted while already married to an unbeliever. Should the believer leave that yoke? The Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 that it is the decision of the unbeliever as to whether he or she stays with the believer. Yet, it must be said that the Lord hates divorce and if there is to be a separation, it has to be with the thought of future reconciliation. If a divorce does take place, then remarriage while the husband or wife lives is still classed as adultery.

We shall now consider “the unequal yoke” as seen in cases of contractual and equal partnership with unbelievers in business. When a believer becomes a partner in a business he virtually surrenders his individual values and beliefs in the sense that the acts of the business become his acts. It is obvious, that at some point, the Christian will disagree with policies made against the will of God. Also, an unbeliever would not have, necessarily, the same degree of honesty in his dealings with others. It is foolish to think that a worldly firm will act on Biblical principles! If you are a Christian in such a yoke, then you should commit the problem to the Lord and seek to disentangle yourself from it.

This is different to being an ordinary employee of a firm or organisation. This is not a ‘defined partnership’. Nevertheless, the Christian may be called upon to do things that he knows are wrong. In that case, he must, with wisdom, make his beliefs known. For example, Christian teachers may be called upon to teach that homosexuality and same sex partnerships are acceptable. In the eyes of God they are not. So what should the Christian teacher do? There is an immediate conflict between what is acceptable in secular life and what is acceptable to a life of faith. Government needs to recognise this.

There are many reasons why Christians should remain separate from the influences of this world. We conclude this talk with seven of them:

1. To avoid the ever-present danger of denying the will of God by adopting the opinions of the world (2 Corinthians 11:32, 15:33; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 2 Peter 2:12).
2. To maintain close fellowship with God the Father (James 4:4; John 15:15).
3. To base their lives on that which is enduring - the word of God - not that which is passing away (John 15:17).
4. To make clear to Christians and non-Christians alike by their witness and works that they belong to God, not to the world (1 Thessalonians 5:22).
5. To be kept from temptation and sin
6. To have fellowship with Christians in order to help those in need.
7. To be more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

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