

In, Not Of, Yet For the World Redux

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Preacher: Kirk van der Swaagh

[0 : 0 0] So, when I knew that I would be finishing up my time of preaching at Crow Road, and there were four slots, so I took them.

! We had three messages on common grace, just something I think is important to consider together, whether it was new to you or old, just good to be refreshed again about how God works in the world through common grace.

There's saving grace, and there's common grace. And then I thought, well, what would I do for the fourth? And that is, I thought, well, I'll preach the same sermon I preached the first time I preached at Crow Road, maybe with a little bit of difference.

But it kind of ties in to this theme of common grace. It's good to be reminded, and of course, I know it was imprinted on all of your hearts and minds, and so maybe I'm just saying things that you could recite back to me.

I doubt it. I doubt that, remember. But there are themes here that really, you know, they show up a lot in the things that I talk about from the pulpit. But I thought it would be good to visit again, because I think it's a helpful perspective, a helpful understanding, again, of our relationship to the world around us.

[1 : 1 3] Yeah? Yeah? So, there's something that's often said, right, in churches, and we know that. It's that Christians are supposed to be in the world, but not of the world.

Christians are supposed to be in the world and not of the world. And some people think that's a verse in the Bible. I mean, it's not explicitly said like that, that Christians are to be in the world, not of the world.

But there's lots of language in the Bible that we can draw that statement from. There's ideas certainly very much present in Paul's writing, many other places in the scripture.

We're in the world, but not of the world. However, what I'd like to do tonight is add an important preposition to that phrase, which is that we are in the world, not of the world, yet for the world.

In the world, not of the world, yet for the world. And all three of the passages that we read, they kind of speak to the same thing, as do many others, as I suggest in the Bible. But we're going to concentrate on this reading from 1 Peter.

[2 : 1 5] Now, if we do not keep that last preposition in view, for the world, our ability to fulfill the great commandment, to love God with all of our being and our neighbors ourselves, it's going to be greatly hindered.

See, the hope is that we will be convinced that our love for God is inextricably tied to our love for neighbor. And that our love for neighbor finds its motivation in our love for God.

So if our not being of the world is only directed toward God or our self-preservation, then we are actually not loving God as he would have us to love him.

Because he's placed us in the world for the world, and that's why he wants us to not be of the world. Now, we should find out first what's meant by the world, right?

We're enjoined again and again in the Bible to not be of the world. But what's meant by that is that we are not to be shaped, molded by the dominant narrative, the dominant ideas, the dominant motivations of the world, of that part of society, frankly, that does not acknowledge God or his commandments.

[3 : 3 0] But what the Bible teaches is that there is a purpose behind our not being of the world. And it is so that we might be for the world. And I think it will be helpful first to consider how the expectation to be in the world but not of the world came to be.

Now, back when I first showed up, I had done a little research before I showed up in Scotland. Then I found out about the old firm teams here in Scotland, right? The Celtic and Rangers.

And I learned at that point that there was enmity between these two teams, or at least between the fans. In fact, just after the last match, right, there's a whole melee in downtown Glasgow, wasn't there, between these people.

And if I got this right, and I think it's been affirmed, that it's such that they make people enter by different entrances and exit by different exits.

That they want to keep them apart. They keep one of them on one side of the pitch and the other fans on the other side of the pitch. There's enmity, right? There's hostility that exists between them.

[4 : 37] And those fans are two different groups of people. They're distinct. Rangers fans are distinct from the Celtic fans. And there is enmity.

There's hostility. There's active opposition that exists between them. And I think that's a helpful illustration for us to understand our relationship to the world in which we, as Christians, live. Believe it or not, there are two distinct peoples in the world, and there's enmity that exists between them.

And it happened at the fall. We know what the fall is. When God had put Adam and Eve in the garden, told them to take care of the garden, use the potential of the garden, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, have dominion.

All the things that a human being was created to do to be God's representative, God's agent in the midst of his creation. And, you know, that there was a prohibition, one small prohibition on them.

They were not to eat of a particular tree, but they ate it. And in the wake of that, if you recall, right after that, God utters three curses, three statements against the serpent, against Eve, and against Adam.

[5 : 44] And what does he tell the serpent? He says, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head, you shall bruise his heel.

Now, there's two sets of people in that pronouncement. The distinction is made between the ones who are aligned with the serpent and the ones who are aligned with the woman, who are the offspring of the serpent and who are the offspring of the woman.

And that distinction is made, and that separation exists throughout the entire biblical story. There's always a distinction between those who are aligned with the offspring of the woman and those who are aligned with the serpent.

Augustine, fifth century, church father, in his famous work, *The City of God*, talks about two distinct societies. City of God and the earthly city or the city of man.

Now, the city of God or society is one that is the heavenly city. The peoples that are aligned with God. And then there is the earthly city.

[6 : 46] The peoples that are aligned with just, well, all the human beings that are not aligned with God. And Augustine says that these two cities have been formed by two loves. The earthly, by love of self, even to the contempt of God.

The heavenly, by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. See, from the very beginning, we have these two distinct groups of people. Those who are striving to love God and to love his law. And those who, frankly, in any way, shape, or form, want to think that we want to consider. They want to think about themselves. They love themselves.

They want to be able to determine who God is. They want to be able to determine what their life will be like. They want to be able to determine their identity. They want to be able to be autonomous. To be a rule unto themselves.

They want to be apart from how God says that they are to be. And how he created them to be. And between these two societies, these two cities, as Augustine calls them, there is enmity that exists.

[7 : 51] And that enmity exhibits itself and has exhibited itself from the very beginning. And what it rests in is, frankly, the relationship with God. That God is.

That he says, this is who I am. This is who you are. And this is how you are to live. And it's either that we come underneath that reality, coming underneath God, or we live outside of him.

Now, that separation persists throughout the biblical story. There's Cain and Abel. There's the people in Noah's ark and the people outside of Noah's ark.

There's Abraham, chosen out of all the other human beings on the face of the earth, with whom God makes a covenant. Right? He says to him, it's to you and your descendants that I'm going to maintain this relationship with.

It's through you that I'm going to indeed bless all the families of the earth. And that promise, that covenant, leads to Israel. They are his special people, right?

[8 : 51] That he's set apart, that he's chosen. And then that leads to Jesus. And it leads to us. It leads to the church. So there is a distinction between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman.

And it persists throughout the biblical narrative, right up to the very end, the last scenes in the book of Revelation. That distinction exists. And what the phrase, in the world, but not of the world, intends to convey is that we, as God's people, are to maintain that distinction.

There's the world living in on reality, living as though the one true God doesn't exist. They're free to evaluate, order, plan everything about their existence as though they had created the world and everything in it, including themselves.

And while we very well may have lived like the rest of the world, we've been called out of the world, the earthly city, to live in the heavenly city, the city of God.

Remember what the Apostle John says. These are stern words. Do not love the world or the things of the world.

[9 : 59] If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, the pride of life, it's not from the Father, but from the world.

And the world is passing away along with its desires, its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. Right? So it's easy, right? It's easy to see how we get the phrase, a Christian is in the world, but not of it.

Right? But let's turn our attention to the passage from 1 Peter. And I think what we'll discover is that while there are two sorts of people in the world, those who belong to God and those who do not, and that there is enmity between them, unlike in the situation with the old firm teams, however, amazingly, God does not want us to be entering and exiting by separate entrances.

He doesn't want us to not mingle, to sit next to those loyal to the other side, as if we should be across the pitch from them. God actually wants his people, his team, his club, if you will, to be mixed in among the others, for he wants us to be in the world, in the midst of this earthly society, this earthly city, because he has a purpose for us.

Now, 1 Peter is a letter written by the Apostle Peter, and he intended it would be read by one believing community, and then another, passed along to one church after another.

[11 : 29] And in God's providence, it's come to us. We have it in our Bible. And Peter intended his audience, excuse me, Peter's intended audience appears to be Christians who have suffered, or are suffering, persecution.

And that's due to their faith in Christ. And so, as he writes this epistle, he seeks to bolster their faith, to urge them to remain faithful. And he holds out to them the hope that we have as Christians, that Christ, our chief shepherd, will return to gather his sheep to himself.

And what's important to note is that that audience is a mixture of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Yet that mixture, despite that mixture between Jew and Gentile, he uses imagery and language from Israel's history to describe all of them.

Together, Jewish believers and Gentile believers are the covenant people of God. As Paul says elsewhere, we Gentile believers, we've been grafted into the redemptive vine that God has been growing since he planted that gospel seed in his promise that one born of a woman would crush the head of the serpent.

And that's important to note, because it emphasizes the not-of aspect of our existence. Israel was a set-apart people, a holy people, chosen by God to be his own people from all the peoples of the earth.

[12 : 50] And that was emphasized by the laws that God gave Israel, to which they were to obediently follow. In fact, one commentator says, Israel was called to demonstrate their holy status and their separateness from the nations, even down to what she ate at mealtimes.

In this way, the clean-unclean food distinctions would have symbolically reminded Israel of her election from the nations. And if we were to back up a few verses in the passage that we read from Peter, we would see how he draws upon various ways in which Israel was described.

He says, You're a chosen generation. You're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own position, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have mercy. Now, if you were to take that passage and you've got a cross-reference Bible, it's likely it's going to point you to places in the law and the prophets that Peter alludes to as he describes believers in Jesus.

See, Israel was a distinct people. They were God's own. The church is a distinct people, God's own. In fact, Paul goes so far as to teach that the church made up of believers, both Jews and Gentiles, are the true Israel of God.

[14:11] So Peter, having established their identity, goes on to exhort those that he's addressing. And what we're going to see is this in the world, but not of the world, yet for the world.

In the world, not of the world, yet for the world. But we'll take them in the order that Peter talks about them. First, not of the world. So look at verse 11. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. This speaks of our being not of the world in two ways.

Positionally and experientially. Positionally and experientially. He says, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles.

Now, I can't think of two words that capture what it means for us to be, as Christians, to not be of the world. What's a sojourner? Well, a sojourner, by definition, is someone who temporarily stays in a place, who's moving through the land.

[15:24] So a Christian is a sojourner because this world is not our true home. We have a place reserved for us in heaven. That place that Jesus is preparing for us. Here what Peter says at the opening of his letter, According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

See, we are not of the world because we are sojourners. We're passing through to our true home. And that's why we're called exiles. And what's an exile?

Well, dictionary definition, a person who lives away from their native country, either from choice or compulsion. You see, as long as we live on this earth, we are living away from what has become, by God's grace, our native country.

If someone asks you, where were you born? And you say, well, I was born in Scotland. I was born in America. I was born in Germany. I was born in China. I was born in Nigeria. What they're asking is, of what country are you a native?

Because that's your homeland. That's your native land, even if you don't live there any longer. But as Christians, we profess that we're born from above. We're born by the Spirit of God and have a new native identity.

[16:48] We're born of heaven, where a Redeemer lives and where we will live when our sojourn is over. So since we have not yet arrived, we might say from that passage in Peter that we are positionally not of this world.

That is, that we're seated with Christ in heavenly places, and one day we will be with him. But also from our passage, we're called to be experientially not of this world.

What do I mean? He says, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. A little bit later in this letter, he goes on, chapter 4, for a few verses here.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves in the same way of thinking. For whoever suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. So live, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, for the duration of our earthly sojourn, no longer for human passions, but for the will of God. For the time that passed suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, lawless idolatry. With respect to this, they're surprised when you don't join them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you.

[18:03] See, we are to experience life in this world differently than we would have if we remained aligned with the offspring of the serpent. So now as Peter says, by God's great mercy, we have been made natives of heaven and therefore we are to live no longer for human passions, but for the will of God.

And, you know, our former brothers and sisters in the family of the serpent, they might be surprised that we don't do the same things that we used to do, but we're no longer of the world.

And not unlike the laws given to Israel by which they maintain their distinctiveness, we too are to maintain our distinctiveness from the nations around us. We too are to take care to no longer be conformed to this world, but be transformed.

So, as sojourners and exiles, we're not of this world positionally, seated with Christ, but also experientially. We no longer live by the dictates that govern the world, by the dominant narrative, the dominant ideas.

So we're not of the world, but we're also, however, in the world, right? Peter indicates that we are in the world, and he does so with a word, a preposition, that comprehensively expresses it.

[19 : 18] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable. What does among mean? It means surrounded by, in the company of.

See, there's no old, firm separation here. Despite the enmity, we are meant to be among those who are at odds with God. You know the language in 1 Corinthians 5, when Paul writes this.

He says, I wrote to you in my letter, he's writing to the Corinthian church, I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. Now, if we were to stop there, we would think, okay, yeah, that's right.

I'm not of the world experientially and positionally. I'm not going to have anything to do with sexually immoral people. And so, I think the best way for me to handle that is to frankly, just go live on the side of a mountain.

Or maybe I'll go live in a monastery. Or maybe I'll only have Christian friends and the only thing I'm going to do is stuff that the church does, otherwise I just stay in my house. Because, you're not to associate with sexually immoral people, Paul says.

[20 : 20] But that's not what he goes on to say. He says, not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world or the greedy or swindlers or idolaters since then you need to go out of the world.

But now I am writing to you to not associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed or is an idolater or a vile or drunk or a swindler not even to eat with such a one.

See, we are actually supposed to associate with the sexually immoral of this world the greedy and the swindlers and idolaters. But note the phrase in which that preposition among occurs in Peter's letter.

He says, keep your conduct among the Gentiles, that is, those who are not part of the true Israel, not in covenant with God, keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable.

Now that's no small challenge. And you take your Bible and you read in the Old Testament how well Israel did at being in the world but not of it. I mean at the very beginning of their journey to the promised land right when Moses was on the mountain receiving the law what was Israel doing?

[21 : 25] Ecstatically worshipping an idol that would have been seen really as the center of pagan religions that surrounded them. And that was only a foreshadowing of the struggle that Israel had in maintaining their distinctiveness time and time again.

They're drawn away from God and from his law and they become indistinguishable from the nations among which they live. among who they live. I mean what was Isaiah Jeremiah Hosea Micah and the rest going on and on about?

They were saying Israel you are in the world and you are of the world. Now God warned them over and over again that blessing would result from their obedience to his will and curses would result from disobedience.

So there was plenty of motivation plenty of motivation from them arising from self-preservation alone for them to heed God's word and live under his rule to maintain their distinctiveness.

But the allure of the world was too great and they were shaped molded by that dominant narrative the dominant ideas the dominant motivations of the earthly city of that part of society that does not acknowledge God or his commandments.

[22 : 35] It cannot happen in the church. Certainly it can happen in the church. It most certainly can and has. When the church is not taking care to maintain its distinctiveness it ends up affirming what the world affirms despite the fact that what the world affirms stands in stark contrast to what God has revealed in his word.

What Peter and Paul are calling us to is not disassociation with the world but distinction from the world. Not disassociation from the world but distinction from the world.

We are not of the world but we are in the world and by in we mean among working with befriending serving in association with those who are in the world with us but we do so and this is the challenge while maintaining our distinctiveness.

Wasn't that what prompted Paul to write as he did in that 1 Corinthians chapter 5 passage. Basically he's saying I don't expect people of the world to act any differently than people of the world will act but if someone in the church is acting in that way and acting in a way that is indistinguishable from the world in that they are doing things contrary to what God expects then you can't associate with them.

The church must maintain its distinctiveness or as Peter says its honor. So we're in the world but not of the world yet we are for the world.

[24 : 10] So he asked the question why do we need to maintain this distinctiveness and Peter tells us it's for the world. As he says in verse 12 keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

They may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Now Peter's already acknowledged in this letter that those he's writing to are suffering.

They're suffering at the hands of those that they live among and he's urged them to not lose heart to persevere to not lose hope now he calls them to live honorably among those people that is to maintain their distinctiveness so that those who had previously persecuted them will see the genuineness of their faith and the life that it produces and actually be convinced that life in Christ is better than life outside of him.

That's possible. At least Peter says it's possible. Jesus says it's possible. Moses told Israel that it was possible that if the people of God maintain their distinctiveness they shine as lights in the middle of the dark place.

If they maintain their distinctiveness as it says in Deuteronomy people will say look at this wise people. They maintain their distinctiveness Peter says that they will glorify God on the day of visitation.

[25 : 39] Now how is that change of heart going to be expressed? It's going to be expressed change of heart on the part of the people around us by indeed giving glory to God on the day of visitation. There's some debate about what's meant by that day of visitation.

It either means when the Holy Spirit visits someone to convert them being born again to that living hope as Peter says at the beginning of the letter or it's the visitation on Christ's return.

In either case they're giving glory to God because they have had their eyes opened to see that Christians in their midst are not to be persecuted but praised.

And this has served to lead them to desire the life that they see the Christian living. A life lived to the glory of God which has provoked others to glorify God. Wayne Grudem New Testament theologian talks about the Greek word that's translated here glorified, doxazo.

He said it occurs 61 times in the New Testament but it is never used to speak of unbelievers who are forced unwillingly to admit that God or his people have been the right in the right.

[26 : 43] Christians living in an unbelieving society must avoid sinful desires and continue to maintain exemplary patterns of life so that unbelievers will be saved and God glorified.

There's no reason to doubt that such a strategy for evangelism would still work today. That is they become persuaded persuaded that living the way you and I live out of love for God and love for a neighbor following the dictates of what God says because he knows how a human being is supposed to live they become persuaded that that's the best way to live and they will give glory to God because they will see it and embrace it.

I can testify in my alone life my living among Christians even in one family's household for several months and observing their life and experiencing their generosity it went a long way towards silencing my previous mocking of them and ultimately to my conversion.

That they lived as they did that was a profound act of love on their part they loved God by seeking to honor and submit to his will for their lives and they did that right in front of me and they did so when they did so they also loved me by presenting before me what it means to be a Christian and because of them at least in part I do give glory to God and will give glory to God both now and on the day of visitation.

Let's try to answer two questions. Why would our genuine God honoring lives be appealing to our neighbors? Why would our God honoring lives be appealing to our neighbors?

[28 : 18] And secondly how would we become how are we to become such compelling people? Well why? I'll suggest that the answer to the why question has to do with that is God honoring lives would be appealing to our neighbors is because that's how we as human beings have been created to live.

See when the fall happened when human beings rejected the oversight of God and the law of God when that fall happened they not only cut off Adam and Eve from God it cut them off from themselves.

They were no longer in touch with their true as God created them selves. See we human beings were made to love God and to live by his wise counsel.

Instead we chose to love ourselves and listen to the unwise counsel of one who hated God with all of his being and when God redeems a person he promises eternal life but he also presents them with life in the here and now as it was meant to be lived.

I've said this before Jesus was the only normal person who ever walked on the face of the earth.

Jesus was the only normal person who ever walked on the face of the earth.

[29 : 31] See he was the only one who joyfully submitted to the father's will the only one who was unencumbered by doubt self love covetousness and all the other malignities that plagued the soul of a human being since the fall.

He was free from them all. And the more we yield to the normal human life the kind of life that Jesus lived the more we communicate to our neighbors that loving God and bringing glory to him is how we are meant to live.

And for those with eyes to see I think it's compelling. Now how? Second question how are we to become such compelling people? And I'd say three things.

First his word. God has given us his word so that we humans can know what constitutes a life lived as it was meant to be lived. It's there for us in black and white.

It's embodied incarnated in the person of Christ. We need only to read it digest it so that God's word and not the world's word shapes and molds and provides the dominant narrative the dominant ideas the dominant motivation for our lives.

[30 : 40] To no longer be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds and God uses by his Holy Spirit his word to do just that to renew our minds.

Indeed the second thing is indeed the presence of his spirit. See the same power that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in each one of us and he is at work transforming us into who we are in Christ. Now the spirit the Lord is the spirit and where the spirit of the Lord is there is freedom Paul says and we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord of being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord who is the spirit.

The Holy Spirit dwells in us. The Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. The Holy Spirit who renewed our hearts awakened us to our need for Christ. The Holy Spirit continues to work in us to transform us to make us more and more like Jesus the only normal human being ever walked in the face of the earth.

And so the more we yield to that work the more we take that seriously to faith and repentance studying God's word the more the Holy Spirit is at work in our life the more and more we'll be shaped into something that is compelling that people might just want to be part of.

[31 : 58] And the last thing I would suggest after his word and the spirit is the church. We've been given to each other to give it to each other to help each other pursue and maintain the distinctiveness that we've been speaking about.

See, Christian discipline is not just what Paul prescribes in that passage from 1 Corinthians. There's a lot of mutual discipline that's to take place before such a situation like that arises.

Now we are to exhort one another encourage one another support one another and at times even lovingly rebuke one another so that we might be the people we've been redeemed to be. See, the problem is when we walk in sin in the church and everybody sees it and does nothing about it then, you know, we're just left to our own devices.

But the church is one of the means of grace that God has given to shape us and mold us into who we are supposed to be. So we want to be someone that's compelling someone who that people look to and say that's a person that I want to be with that's a person that I want to be like.

And because the more and more we live as we were created and redeemed to live the more and more that's what we present to the world that's that light set upon a lampstand.

[33 : 17] But to get there we need his word we need his spirit and we need his people. See, we are people who are in the world but not of the world yet for the world.

And as I did when I first preached this I'll do it now. In fact, we're going to change the order of the prepositions and throw in a different adverb. Instead of in the world not of the world yet for the world we're in the world for the world therefore not of the world.

We're in the world for the world therefore not of the world. I think that's a kind of similar idea if you were here when our friend Paul Murphy was preaching and he said it's not that God has a mission for the church.

God has a church for his mission. Not that God has a mission for the church God has a church for his mission. And in a similar way God has us in the world because he has a mission for us and that's to be those people who become compelling.

And so we maintain our distinctiveness because we're in the world but we're here for the world therefore we are not of the world. Now I understand all of that is incredibly challenging to do right?

[34 : 35] To really resist the temptation we still were with the old self that seeks that just draws back there's so many things that allure that draws back and I've talked about common grace for the last three messages and you know common grace we can't be careful as I said we can't blur those lines we put too much too much confidence in common grace to transform the world and we'll end up like the world.

We have much in common but there are things that make us distinctive and when we major on the distinctives as we are involved in common grace in the world it's then that I believe we're representing God well.

We are that city set upon a hill we are that light on a lamp stand we are those whom God looks to see and people look to see and give glory to God for the good works that we've done.

May God grant us that grace to do it.