

In, Not Of, Yet For The World

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[0 : 00] So there's something often said in church circles in America, and perhaps you've heard it here. As Christians, we are in the world, but not of the world. In the world, but not of the world. I've heard people say, that's a verse in the Bible, isn't it?

Didn't Apostle Paul say that? Well, no, there is an explicit verse in the Bible that says that we are in the world, but not of it. But certainly the idea is very much present in Paul's writings and in many other places in Scripture.

In the world, but not of the world. However, there's an important preposition to add to that phrase. In, not of, yet for.

In the world, but not of the world, yet for the world. And all three of the passages that we read speak to this, as do many others in the Bible. And if we are going to keep that last preposition in view, which we must, that preposition for the world, if we do not keep it in front of us, our ability to fulfill the great commandment, to love God with all of our being and our neighbor as ourselves, will be greatly undermined.

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.

[1 : 21] If our not being of the world is only directed toward God, then we have actually not loving God as he would have us to love him, because he has placed us in the world for the world.

And that is why he does not want us to be of the world. What do we mean by the world? Well, we're enjoined again and again in the Bible to not be of the world.

And what it means by that is that we're not to be shaped, molded by the dominant narrative, the dominant ideas, the dominant motivations of the world, of that part of society that does not acknowledge God or his commandments.

But what the Bible teaches is that there is a purpose behind our not being of the world. It is that we might be, as I said, for the world. Now, I'm going to ask you to pray with me to see if I can make sense of how these prepositions work with each other.

Let's pray. God, we need you to understand your word. We need to have your Holy Spirit be at work in and through your word to shape us, to mold us, to bring your dominant narrative into our hearts and minds so that we might know you better, serve you better, and love our neighbors better.

[2 : 33] Lord, all this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. I think it would be helpful to first encounter how this expectation to be in the world, but not of the world, came to be.

Now, I hope I get this right. Prior to my coming to Scotland, I learned about your old firm football teams, the Rangers and the Celtics, and their serious enmity between them, right?

Hostility. Am I right? I understand that when they play each other, their respective fans have to enter and exit by different doors. And they have to sit on opposite sides of the pitch.

And I understand there's some sort of religious connection with this, probably also grounded in some social, cultural dynamics. Those two fans, those two groups of people, they are distinct, and yet there is enmity, active opposition that exists between them.

Have I got that right? Yeah? Okay. I think it's a helpful illustration for us understanding about our relationship to the world in which we, as Christians, live.

[3 : 39] Believe it or not, there are two distinct peoples in the world, and there's enmity that exists between them. And what is the source of that? Always go back to the beginning. We go back to the fall. Remember, God makes human beings.

He puts them in the Garden of Eden. He says, You can eat anything you want in this garden except for one tree. And along comes the devil and the guise of the serpent. He speaks to them, and he says, Don't worry about that.

You can eat of that tree. God didn't really ask you to do that. And you know what? The fact is, God's trying to hold all the glory and power to himself. If you eat of that tree, you will be like God.

And what do they do? They eat of the tree. And that's what we call the fall. It's then that their life, their relationship with God is ruptured.

And we'll get back to that later. Now, if you recall, right after the fall, God utters three curses, statements against the serpent, and against Eve, and against Adam. And what does he tell the serpent? He says, I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring.

[4 : 42] He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. Now, there's two different sets of people in that pronouncement. And 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, as it were, and who are the offspring of the woman.

Now, the distinction is made, and that separation exists throughout the biblical narrative. 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. He calls them cities. The city of God and the earthly city.

The city of God, or society, is the one that is the heavenly city, the peoples that are aligned with God. And then there is the earthly city, the peoples that are aligned with, well, just all the human beings that are not aligned with God.

And Augustine says this, 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.

[5 : 53] From the very beginning, we have these two distinct groups of people. Those who are striving to love God, to love his law, and those who frankly, in any way, shape, or form you want to think about it, love themselves.

They want to be able to determine who is God. 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 along to themselves, to be themselves as they want to be apart from how God says they are and how they ought to be.

And between these two societies, these two cities, as Augustine calls them, there is enmity that exists. And it, that enmity, exhibits itself and has exhibited itself from the very beginning.

And what it rests in, frankly, is this relationship to God. That God is. And he says, this is who I am, this is who you are, this is how you are to live.

And it's either that we come underneath that reality, come underneath God, or we live outside of him. Now this separation, this separation persists throughout the biblical narrative.

[7 : 01] There's Cain and Abel, there's the people in Noah's ark and the people outside of the ark, there's Abraham chosen out of all the other human beings on the face of the earth. He's the one person that God comes and he says, I'm going to use you and your descendants.

It's you that I'm going to maintain this relationship through so that all the families of the earth will be blessed. That leads to Israel. They are his special people that he's set apart, that he's chosen.

That leads to Jesus and it leads to us. It leads to the church. There's a distinction between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman.

It persists throughout the biblical narrative right up to the very end, the last scenes in the book of Revelation, that distinction still exists. Now what the phrase, in the world but not of the world, I believe intends to communicate, is that we as God's people are to maintain that distinction.

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

[8 : 11] And while we may very well have lived like the rest of the world, we have been called out of the world, the earthly city, to live in the heavenly city, the city of God.

What does the Apostle John say? Do not love the world or the things in the world. 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, and pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world.

And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. It's easy to see how this phrase, in the world but not of it, gained a lot of traction, even to the point of people thinking that it's a verse from the Bible.

Well, while all three of the passages concern our theme for tonight, we're going to look at 1 Peter 2. But let's think first about the context, because I think what we're going to discover as we look at this passage from Peter 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 the situation with the old firm teams, amazingly, God does not want us to be entering and exiting by separate entrances.

He doesn't want us to sit on opposite sides of the pitch. He doesn't want us to not mingle, to not sit next to those loyal to the other side. God actually wants his people, his team, his club, if you will, to be mixed in among the others.

[9 : 45] For he wants us to be in the world, in the midst of the earthly society, this earthly city, because he has a purpose for us. Let's look at the context of 1 Peter.

Peter is a letter, this letter is a letter written by the apostle Peter, and that he intended would be read by one believing community and then passed along to another. And in God's gracious providence, we have it now.

His intended audience at first appears to be Christians who have suffered or are suffering persecution due to their faith in Christ. And he writes to bolster their faith, to urge them to remain faithful.

He holds out before them the hope that we have as Christians in Christ. Our chief shepherd will return to gather his sheep to himself. And what's important to note is that the audience is a mixture of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

Yet despite the mixture, he uses imagery and language from Israel's history to describe all of them, whether they're a Jew or whether they're a Gentile, because they are now all part of what Paul calls the true Israel.

[10 : 51] Together, Jewish believers and Gentile believers are indeed the covenant people of God. As Paul says, we Gentile believers have 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 will crush the head of the serpent.

And this is 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 from all the peoples of the earth.

And this was emphasized by the laws that God gave Israel which they were to obediently follow. As one commentator explains, Israel was called to demonstrate her holy status and separateness from the nations.

Even down to what she ate at mealtimes. mealtimes. In this way, the clean-unclean food distinctions would have symbolically reminded Israel of her election from the nations. So, when we go to read now, 1 Peter, when we consider these verses, we want to remember that the people that he's talking to are these indeed distinct people called Jew and Gentile out now to be God's holy people.

In fact, if we back up a couple of verses from what we just read, we'll hear this language echo. He says, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[12 : 18] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. If you have a croft-reference Bible at your disposal, and if you take time to look at it, it's likely going to point you to all the places in the law and the prophets that Peter alludes to as he describes these believers in Jesus.

Israel was a distinct people, God's own. The church is now that distinct people, God's own. In fact, Paul goes so far as to teach that the church made up of both believers, of believers of both Jewish and Gentiles, as I said, is indeed the true Israel of God.

Now, having established their identity, Peter goes on to exhort them, the ones he has addressing, he goes on to exhort them, and we'll see, I believe, this in the world but not of the world yet for the world dynamic, but we'll take them in the order that Peter uses.

First, not of the world. Verse 11, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of flesh which war against your soul.

This language, that first verse 11, speaks of our not being in the world in two ways, positionally and experientially. What does he say?

[13 : 35] First, he calls us sojourners and exiles. Can there be two words more exact that capture what it means for us as Christians to not be of the world?

What is a sojourner? By definition, it's someone who temporarily stays in a place who's moving through the land. A Christian is a sojourner because the world is not our true home.

We have a place reserved for us in heaven. A place that Jesus is preparing for us. Listen to what Peter says at the opening of this same 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, through an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

We are not of the world because we are sojourners passing through to our true home. And that's why we can be called exiles. What's an exile?

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

[14 : 54] If someone asks you, where were you born? they're asking you what country you are a native of. So whether you're Scotland, America, Germany, China, Nigeria, that is your native land even if you no longer live there.

As a Christian, we profess that we're born from above. We're born by the spirit of God and we have a new native identity. We're born of heaven where our redeemer lives and where we will live when our sojourn is over.

And so since we have not yet arrived, we might say that from our passage in Peter, we are positionally not of this world. We're seated with Christ in heavenly places and one day we will be with him.

But also from this passage, we are 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 war against your soul.

Later on in this letter, he goes to explain more fully what he means by this. He says that we should not live for the rest of our time in the flesh, that is for the duration of this earthly sojourn.

[16 : 01] No longer should we live for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

With respect to this, they're surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you. See, we are to experience life in this world differently than we would have if we remained aligned with the offspring of the serpent.

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. Our former brothers and sisters in the family of the serpent might be surprised that we don't do the same things that we used to do with them but we're no longer of the world and not unlike the laws given to Israel by which they maintain their distinctiveness from the nations around them, we too are to take care that no longer are we to be conformed to this world but as Paul says, transformed.

So, sojourners and exiles, we are not of this world positionally and experientially yet we are in the world.

See, Peter indicates that we are in the world and he does so again with a word of preposition that comprehensively expresses it. He says, keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable.

[17 : 28] What does among mean? It means surrounded by, in the company of, no old firm separation here, no being on the other side of the stadium, no exiting, entering by different doors, no nothing, nothing to do with one another.

Despite the enmity, we are meant to be among those who are at odds with God. Paul says this, this is an extraordinary passage when we think about it and we're thinking about being in the world, not of the world.

In 1 Corinthians 5, he's alluding to a letter that he had previously written to them and he said, I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. Now, a lot of Christians would stop right there and say, right, I should have nothing to do with sexually immoral people.

In fact, I don't want any sexually immoral people in my church. But that's not what he's talking about. I mean, if it was that the world to being in the world and not of the world were equivalent, then we'd say, right, that's why I live on the side of a mountain.

That's why I'm behind the walls of a religious community. That's why I only have Christian friends. But that's not what Paul is driving at. He's talking about someone in the church and what he goes on to say is remarkable.

[18 : 36] He says, I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. Not at all meaning the sexually immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters since then you'd have the need to go out of the world.

But now I am writing you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed or so on. What Paul is suggesting, what he's teaching, is that we are to associate with the sexually immoral people of this world, the greedy, the swindlers and the idolaters.

But note the phrase in which that preposition among occurs in Peter's letter. He says, keep your conduct honorable, excuse me, keep your conduct among the Gentiles.

Again, those who are not part of the true Israel, not in covenant relationship with God. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable. That is no small challenge.

Take your Bible and read in the Old Testament how well Israel did at being in the world but not of it. At the very beginning of their journey to the promised land when Moses was on the mountain receiving the law, what was Israel doing?

[19 : 45] They were ecstatically worshipping an idol that would have been at the center of pagan religions that surrounded them. And that was just the foreshadowing of the struggle that Israel had in maintaining their distinctiveness.

Time and again, time and again, they are drawn away from God and his law to become indistinguishable from the nations among which they lived. What was Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Micah, and all the rest?

What were they going on about? If not 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 arising even from self-preservation that they would heed God's word and live under his rule, maintain their distinctiveness.

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

[20 : 53] Can this happen to the church? It most certainly can and has. When the church has not taken 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.

One obvious contemporary example is the world's affirmation of an understanding of human sexuality that is explicitly condemned by God. God has said those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But there are some who travel under the banner of Christianity they say, you don't need to pay attention to those parts of the Bible. God, you know, those ideas, they come from unenlightened, culturally bound, spiritually immature men who claim to love God and neighbor but were obviously closed-minded bigots we know better.

In America, some who travel under the banner of Christianity have so aligned themselves with certain political factions that they have become indistinguishable from the rest of the world and that they have become just another voting block that seeks earthly power by any means necessary.

They ignore the admonition of the psalmist and says, it's better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes. It's difficult.

[22 : 15] It's hard to be in the world and yet maintain our distinctiveness. but we must be understanding that what Peter and Paul are calling to this two is not disassociation with the world, not disassociation with 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, and association with those who are in the world with us.

But we do so and here's the challenge, while maintaining our distinctiveness. Wasn't that what prompted Paul to write as he did when he said, you know, don't have anything to do with the sexually immoral person?

What he was talking about was the one that's in the church. It's as if Paul's saying, I don't expect people of the world to act any differently than the people of the world are going to act. But if someone in the church is acting in ways that are indistinguishable from the world and 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, their honor, they need to be honorable among the Gentiles. So, we are indeed in the world, but not of the world, and by that we mean that we are looking to maintain our distinctiveness as Christians.

[23 : 40] We are Christians, yet we are Christians in the world. why do we labor to maintain this distinction? What is the import of it?

Paul tells us it's for, excuse me, Peter tells us it's for the world. 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. Peter has already acknowledged in this letter the suffering that his readers have gone through at the hands of those that they live among.

And he has urged them to not lose heart, to persevere, to not lose hope. Now he calls them to live honorably among these people. That is, to maintain their distinctiveness so those who had previously been persecuting 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.

And how is that change of heart expressed by their giving glory to God on the day of visitation? Now there's some debate about what is meant by the day of visitation.

[25 : 01] It either means when the Holy Spirit visits them, they're converted by being born again to this living hope that Peter talks about or it's the day of visitation of Christ's return. But in either case, they are giving glory to God because they have had their eyes open to see that Christians in their midst are not to be persecuted but praised.

Neither also their God is not to be mocked but to be honored. In fact, as one commentator points out, the verb that's translated here, glorify, occurs 61 times in the New Testament and it's never used to speak of unbelievers who are forced unwillingly to admit that God or his people have been in the right.

Indeed, as Revelation 16, 9 says, they even refuse to do this. Now Christians living in an unbelieving society must avoid sinful desires to continually maintain exemplary patterns of life so that unbelievers will be saved and God glorified.

And he goes on to say, there's no reason to doubt that such a strategy for evangelism would still work today. See, what's happened is that they have been led to desire the life that they see these other Christians living.

A life lived to the glory of God which provokes others to glory God. And I can testify that in my own life, my living among Christians, even in one's family's house for several months and observing their life and experiencing their generosity went a long way towards silencing my previous mocking of them and ultimately to my conversion.

[26 : 39] 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 but they also loved me. They loved me by presenting before me what it means to be a Christian.

And because of that, at least in part, I give glory to God and will give glory to God both now and on judgment day. So, we are to be in the world and by in, I mean in.

But we are not to be of the world and by not being of the world it means that we remain as Christians. Christians who love God and love neighbor who are serious about growing in our faith and being transformed by the power of God in our lives so that we might live, as the writer says, exemplarily lives before others.

And yet, that's challenged. It's difficult. And so, we want to ask a couple of questions. Why would our genuine God-honoring lives be compelling to our neighbors?

And how are we to become such compelling people? Well, I'll suggest that the answer to that first question why would such God-honoring lives be compelling?

[27 : 57] Is, that is how human beings have been created to live. See, when the fall happened, it not only cut off Adam and Eve from God, it cut them off from themselves.

We human beings, we human beings, we are made to love God and to live by his wise counsel. Instead, at the fall, we chose to live, love ourselves and to listen to the unwise counsel, the 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. Listen, Jesus is the only normal human being who has ever walked on the face of the earth.

He's the only normal human being who has ever walked on the face of the earth. And what do I mean by that? He's the only one who lived without the cloud. He wasn't encumbered by self-doubt, by self-love, by covetousness, and by the host of other malignities that war against the soul, as Peter says, because of the fall.

He loved God. He loved God's word. And he lived in love for God. And that turned him around to make love for neighbor. And he was there, indeed, to bring redemption, to bring the word of life to the people around him.

[29 : 15] He is the only person who lived as we were created to live. And now, we have been redeemed to live. That we might live like Jesus. He was free from all the garbage that we have to deal with in our lives.

He was free from it. But nonetheless, we have been changed. We have been renewed. The spirit of God dwells inside of us. And that leads us to the second question. How do we actually become such compelling people?

Well, the more we yield to 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 yet, there takes three things, I believe, that help us with this process. The first is God's word. God has given us his word so that we humans can know what constitutes a life lived as it was meant to live.

It's there for us in black and white. It's embodied. It's incarnated in the person and life of Christ. We need only to read it, to digest it, so that it's God's word and not the world's word that shapes and molds and provides a dominant narrative and dominant ideas for us as we live our lives.

[30 : 28] God's word is given to us to show us what it means to live as we were supposed to live. And then he's given to us his spirit. That same power that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in each one of his children.

And he is at work transforming us into who we are in Christ, enabling us to actually do the will of God. Listen to what Paul writes. Now the Lord is the spirit and where the spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.

And we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into that same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the spirit. We are made in the image of God.

That image remains but it's tarnished but yet with the power of God working in our lives it gets shined up and we begin to reflect back God's own being, his own person.

And we have Jesus as our exemplar. Jesus that we can look to and we pursue the life that Jesus lived and we have the power of God in us to do it and we begin to become compelling. And lastly we have his church.

[31 : 32] We have been given to each other to help each other pursue and maintain the distinctiveness that we have been talking about. You know, church discipline is not just what Paul was prescribing in that passage from 1 Corinthians 5 that I read.

There's a lot of mutual discipline that's supposed to take place before such situations arise. We are to exhort, to encourage, to support and at times lovingly rebuke one another so that we might be the people we've been redeemed to be.

People who are in the world but not of the world yet for the world. In fact, let's change the order of those prepositions and throw in an adverb.

Instead of in the world not of the world yet for the world we're in the world for the world therefore we are not of the world.

Yeah? Pray with me. Gracious God we want to be what you've called us to be. what you've redeemed us to be. We want to be people who are compelling to others.

[32 : 37] We know it's your spirit. It's you, Lord, who draws people. But yet even as we heard this morning you use your people to draw others to you. And Lord, we want to be a community of people that are compelling because we've discovered where life is it's in Jesus.

We've discovered how we are created as human beings and how we're supposed to live because you've told us in your word. And Lord, we thank you that you imparted to us that same spirit that raised Jesus from the dead so that we might be empowered to live as we've been called and redeemed to live.

Lord, we want to have people give you glory on the day of visitation. And whether that means when you visit them by your spirit or whether that means on the day when Christ returns to gather to himself his own, we want more worshipers, more glorifying worshipers of God on that day.

So we pray you help us. Help us to be shaped to be more and more the kind of people that we're supposed to be so that we might not just be in the world but for the world.

And this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[33 : 57] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.