

What is Worldliness?

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back to the passage we read now for a short time, 1st John chapter 2 and reading again verse 15 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 and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions 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. We're going to do a short series of topical studies. That's to say not just taking a text or a book of the Bible or a passage and going through it in detail but topics which the Bible obviously teaches us but which you find in various places in the scriptures.

But topics which are in some senses commonly referred to and yet may not be easily defined or there may have been some misunderstanding of them over time.

[1 : 11] Topics for example like this evening when we are looking from this passage at the topic of worldliness or being worldly. What is worldliness?

What does it mean to be worldly? What does the Bible elsewhere tell us and teach us about worldly, being worldly and where does it give us insight into what it means to be worldly?

And then there are other issues like that, especially issues that affect our practical way of life or our practical service for God where these topics are so important on that level that it's important for us to realise something of the meaning of them and expand them out a wee bit and perhaps even ask ourselves have I been mistaken about my idea of what worldliness for example is?

And we'll look at other things such as witness. What is witness to the Lord? What is membership of the church? What does that actually entail?

What is it in terms of its privileges and its responsibilities? What is holiness? What is holiness of life practically? What is conversion?

[2 : 29] How is it made known? These kind of topics, words which we're familiar with, words which are often used by us. So-and-so is converted. So-and-so is a member of the church.

Such-and-such is a worldly practice or that's a very worldly person. That person is a good witness. What do these words actually mean and how do we apply them to our lives as they arise from the teaching of the Bible?

Well, let's begin this evening by looking at this passage which obviously deals with the issue of worldliness or being worldly. Being in love with the world.

Do not love the world or the things in or of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them. For all that is in the world, and this is in some ways a summary or a definition of it, the desires of the flesh.

We'll look at the words in a minute more closely. But it's better to use the AV language, I think, in this instance, that the lust of the flesh, rather than desires, is rather weak compared to the word that's there.

[3 : 35] The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, not just simply possessions, but the pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world.

And the world is passing away along with its lusts, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. Let's ask first of all, what is meant in this passage by the world?

Because the world is used in scripture in various places, and in fact, just at first sight if you didn't know the Bible all that well, and you're just beginning perhaps to read or to study the Bible, which I know none of you is in that category.

But you can just imagine someone coming to read the Bible for the first few times, and going to, being advised, go to John's writings, go to John 3, and in John 3 they would read, For God so loved the world.

And then they come to 1 John 2, and it says, Do not love the world. And may think that there's something of a contradiction there. How is it that God is said to have loved the world, and yet God's people are commanded not to love the world, and that the love of the world is not of the Father, but is from the world.

[4 : 51] Well, of course, all that tells you that the word world is used in different ways, that has different meanings in different contexts in the Bible.

In John 3, 16, for example, the word means the world in terms of human beings, without really in any way making a distinction there between believers and unbelievers, the saved or unsaved. It's simply asking what kind of thing, what kind of people were they that God loved? They were the world. They were without distinction from anyone else, from any others.

They were all, in a sense, that way, the world. Because the world, in that specific sense of it, really means this world of people as sinners, organized against God, in an enmity against God, in a lost condition.

That is what God loved. And, of course, you find world used also in the physical sense of the creation, the world around you, the natural world, that's also found in the Bible.

[6 : 03] But here, in this context, world has a third meaning. These are the three main meanings of it. There's the natural world, the creation. There is the world in the sense of the kind of people that God loved, and sending a son to die for them.

Sinners. Then there's this meaning here, which really has to do with lifestyle. Of course, that comes into the issue of sin and sinners as well. But a lifestyle or an outlook or an attitude as well, that's involved in being of the world in the sinful sense.

That's what's meant in it here, being of the world and all that is in the world. So, the world in this context means that particular lifestyle that is arranged against God and towards sin, and is involved in the kind of lifestyle that is opposed to, or opposite to, the one that God requires of his people. Or, you might say, the lifestyle from which God redeems us. You remember Peter saying that he and that God redeemed his people from the vain traditions, the vain way of life received by tradition from your fathers.

Well, that had a specific Old Testament reference. It's nevertheless something that is true of every generation, that they have a worldliness, that they have an attitude contrary to God, against the gospel of God, until God redeems them and brings them out of that.

[7 : 44] He has delivered them out of that and into a different state, a different way of life with a different attitude. So, that is the world in the meaning of it there, specifically in that narrower sense.

It is the lifestyle associated with being contrary to God, and to God's ways, and to God's standards, and to God's requirements, and to God's commands, and so on.

So, what is it to love the world then? If that's the narrower meaning of it, it says here, if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them. Well, we can go to verse 16 in order to answer that.

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 in the Father.

What is it to love the world? What is it to be worldly? Well, the first thing to note about it is that it begins, it originates in our souls.

[8 : 50] You don't begin to try and define worldliness by first of all looking at a person and what they are doing, or by setting up a series of things which you imagine Christians ought not to do, or even, if they are things genuinely which they ought not to do, there are certain things down through the generations that certain groups of Christians have thought wrong, and other Christians have not had a problem with.

Take, for example, smoking, or drinking alcohol in moderation. There are some Christians who would say to you, tonight, in our own country, and elsewhere in the world, a person who does these, a Christian who does these things, even within limits, is being worldly.

These are worldly activities. Or a Christian who goes to the theatre to listen to the opera, or goes to the pictures, or goes to a football match. These are worldly things.

No Christian should be involved in that, because they are worldly. And that's beginning with things which are set up as taboos, as usually the word mentioned. And worldliness, or holiness, or the Christian life, is designed in terms of these things.

And you do, or you don't do them, and therefore you are, or you're not, worldly. That's not where we begin. We begin with the definition of worldly, where the Bible begins of it.

[10:16] And that's here, in our hearts, in our souls. Because what it says is, all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Lust, pride, where does it begin? Not in an outward conduct, but in the heart, in the desires, in the lust of the flesh, of the heart, of the human soul.

And of the believing soul too, if you think of it as, something that, Christians need to, be careful against. There's a rather amusing story, of a minister, down south in England, at one time, who was constantly, preaching apparently, about what Christians do, and do not do.

Christians don't smoke. Christians don't drink alcohol. Christians don't do this. Christians don't do that. Christians do this. And one of his congregations, when all of that was going on, all the time, that was virtually, the content of the sermons, week after week.

And this man said to him, Pastor, I've got something, to show you. I've come across, a really outstanding Christian. And he took him down to a field. And he got him to look over the fence.

[11:30] And in the field was a donkey. And he said to the pastor, there's your ideal Christian, there's your perfect Christian. And the pastor said, where? He said, there.

Because that animal doesn't smoke, and he doesn't drink, and he doesn't go to dances. And therefore, he must be a perfect Christian. You see, the mistake the pastor was making, was setting up things, which are do's and don'ts.

Even if some of them, were very legitimate. But he was beginning, in the wrong place. And this person realized it, and said, that's not where you begin. You begin by, looking at what's in the heart, and then what comes out from there, and then defining it, in those terms.

That's what John is doing. That's where he's taking us, first of all. And this word, lust, is really significant. Because it's a very strong word. That's why it's better to use the word lust, than the word desire.

Unless you have the word, strong desire. And sometimes, sometimes in the Bible, it's actually used in a good sense. Remember, Jesus said to the disciples, with desire, I have desire to eat the Passover with you, before I suffer.

[12:36] That's exactly the same word in Greek, that's used here. With strong desire, I have desire to eat this Passover. Just imagine Jesus, and the strength of his desire, to share this Passover, with the disciples.

Well, take it to the other side of it, and that's the strength of the word, that's used here, in terms of lust, in the sinful sense, in the bad sense. It is the lust, of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and it's pride, in possession, it's a swelling boastfulness, which again begins, inwardly.

And if you go to Mark, chapter 4, verse 18, there's similar passages to that, where the parable of the sower, that Jesus mentioned, where the seed amongst the thorns, was choked by the thorns.

And he said, that is a picture for you, that's a representation for you, of the kind of thing, that actually chokes the word of God.

And what did he say it was? He said it was, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts, or the desires, that accompany, this life, the natural things, of this life, they actually choke, the word he says, and it does not grow.

[14:08] And you can follow it out, in various other parts, of scripture as well. Ephesians 2, for example, has it, as that which once characterized, the way that, we were, until grace, changed things.

That same word, again, is used in Ephesians, chapter 2, at the beginning. You, who were dead in the trespasses, and sins, in which you once walked, following the course, of this world, following the prince, of the power of the air, the spirit that is at work, and the sons of disobedience, amongst whom, we all once lived, in the passions, of our flesh, carrying out, the desire, the lust of the body, on the mind, and so on.

That's the kind of, lifestyle, that's the kind of, inner source, from which, this worldliness proceeds. So it's important to think, that's where it starts.

It's not just starting, in looking at things outwardly, you have to start with, an attitude. It's a mindset. It's something that begins, in the soul. And, it has three aspects, to it.

From that, you get these definitions, or these three concepts, or three aspects, to worldliness, in verse 16. And this is really coming, to a more precise, definition of it.

[15 : 28] First of all, it's the lust, of the flesh, the lusts of the flesh. In other words, it's the physical, rather than the spiritual, that's emphasized, in worldliness.

Worldliness, emphasizes, what is physical, over and above, or contrary to, what is spiritual. You'll always find, that a person, who is really worldly, is not just occasionally, involved in some activities, which some people, might find dubious.

A worldly person, is a person, whose focus is upon, and whose mindset, is on the physical, rather than on the spiritual. individual. Let's just, take an example.

If you were, at a wedding dance, and somebody said to you, that's worldliness, you're a very, worldly person, for doing that. Well, that's very different, to somebody, who makes it, their habitual, practice, and who live, from week to week, for, all the excessive, um, dancing, and drinking, that they can engage in, whether it's at the weekend, or wherever.

That's worldliness. But an occasional, being found, at a function, where, you're at a wedding, or something, that's a different thing. It might be in the same place, as the person, who's there, constantly, two or three times a week.

[16 : 54] That's the course, of worldliness. That's where you find, the difference between, that which is occasional, and that which is habitual. The person, who is giving emphasis, to the material, constantly, above the spiritual, that person, is worldly.

That person, is certainly, of a worldly mind. And of course, that can involve, not just, your body, and your bodily functions, so that you've got things like, well, let's, let's be graphic about it, let's be, straight about it, what the world, lives for the world, in its world, and as, today, as you look out there, and, as you well know, there are excesses, in sexual activities, in all that's associated, with that, in terms of, pornography, in terms of, people being steeped, in that sort of, way of life, or habitually, in that sort of, way of life.

That is part of, the worldliness, that is contrary to God. It's, emphasizing, the physical, rather than, the spiritual. But you can extend that, to property, to money, to possessions, to the body itself, of course, to, things like, sport, when they are put, the body is put, above the spiritual.

When sport, or exercise, or recreation, excessively focuses, on the body, to the neglect, of the spiritual. That is being, again, unworldly. I think, wrong with sport, in itself.

But there is, if the body itself, if the physical, is, what is placed, above, the spiritual. In fact, if you, if you look at, the adverts, adverts, are always, a good indicator, as to the way, the world is thinking.

[18 : 45] As to what is, in fact, the preoccupation, or the priorities, of the world, of people, in general, and especially people, who don't care, for the spiritual, or for the religious, or for God.

You look at the adverts, and by and large, most, if not all of them, are directed, to worldliness. They want you, to have more, electronic gadgets, more drink, to be consumed.

All of the things, that you find, in adverts, that are, pushed at people, have to do, with a worldly attitude. Things which, have to do with, pampering your body, over and above, looking after your soul.

Well again, there's nothing wrong, with a bit of makeup. Unless you're, male. But, the fact is, that it is something, which, in excess, or given a preoccupation, with it, it actually, it actually, takes you away, from, looking after your soul, looking after your spiritual side.

And that means, you're becoming worldly, or you are a worldly person, if that's your attitude, if that's your mindset, if that's, if you're setting the physical, above, the, the, the, the spiritual.

[20 : 06] One thing, I'm just going to mention this, in passing, you'll have noticed it yourselves, but, it's a sign, of increased worldliness, I think, and certainly, in terms of the, the, the, the way in which mammon, or money, or that side of things, is being promoted so much, you will have noticed, amongst the adverts, a huge increase, over the last two, three years, of adverts, in favour of gambling.

And many people, of course, are involved in gambling, and that, I know there's, sometimes, a difficulty of definition, as to what gambling is. But you know the kind of gambling, we're talking about, gambling in terms of the horses, or the dogs, or, poker games, or, online casinos, or, actual casinos, in this world.

That sort of gambling, into which, so many people, sadly, are really sucked in, to their financial ruin, and to their family's ruin, as well. And it's so bright, and so easy, when you see an advert, on your TV, and you find that you can use this, on your phone, it's, it's direct, that you can do this, on your phone, you're told, and we'll give you ten pounds, to start you off.

Yes, but where does it end? And what's the spirit of it anyway? And what's it to do with? It's to do with the material, in terms of the financial, above the spiritual. It's to do with putting your trust, in luck, rather than in God.

It's to do with, trying to manipulate things, in a way that brings you, financial success, instead of getting on your knees, to pray. That's why, all of these things, are of the world, and not of the Father.

[21 : 42] So it's the physical, above or rather, than the spiritual. It's the lust, of the flesh. In the physical sense. Secondly, it's the lust, of the desires, of the eyes.

It's not just the physical, rather than the spiritual. It's, you might say, sight, rather than faith. It's what you can see, it's what you're actually aware of, in the present time, rather than putting your trust, in God, and in God's word, with a view to the future, that God plans, and promises for his people.

In other words, it's not just sight, rather than faith. You can say, another way is, to, another way of looking at it, is, it's the present, rather than what is to come, again, in the spiritual sense.

That overlaps, of course, here, because, what you find, in the physical, rather than the spiritual, carries into, what is of the present moment, rather than, the future, that God has for his people.

You live, for this present moment. You live, for this present time. You live, within the borders, of sense, and of sight. You're not interested, in the things, that you cannot see, physically, and prove, for yourself, if you're a worldly person, thoroughly steeped, in the world.

[23 : 00] You live, for this world. You live, for time. You live, not beyond the borders, of your present life. And that's it. You don't think, beyond the present.

You don't think, beyond the moment, in your life, that you're present, you are even. Never mind, the rest of your life, sometimes. There is one man, in the New Testament, that's, actually described, for us in this way.

And it's quite interesting, and significant, the way he's described. And you know, the name of that man, is Demas. Not much at all, about him, in the New Testament.

But you find him, in Paul's letter, to the Colossians, being commended, in some sense, along with, Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas. They're sending, greetings.

They're with, the apostle. And, he's called, there simply, Demas. But he's associated, with Luke, the beloved physician, this man of God, this helper of Paul, and they're there, together, with Paul, in the service, of the gospel.

[24 : 06] And yet, in Paul's, one of Paul's last letters, if not the last letter, in 2nd Timothy, chapter 4, verses 9 to 10, he's mentioned again. And he's mentioned, in a very different way.

Because, Paul says, Demas has forsaken me. And he tells us, what's behind the forsaken. Having, loved, this, present, world.

Demas, left Paul, and left, the service of Christ. And Paul says, it's because, he has loved, this, this present world.

He has gone back, into the love of the world. Of course, that's a very, a very solemn thing, when you think of, where Demas was, prior to that, with the apostle, with Luke, the beloved physician.

And yet, this is what Paul is, actually saying to him. Saying about him, he has loved, he has come to love, the present world. He has forsaken me. He's left this work. He's gone. He's gone back to the world.

[25 : 12] And that's why, sometimes you speak about people, going back to the world. More so than just, backslidden. They've just, gone away altogether. Gone back to the world, and to the ways of the world.

Well, the world, in that sense, is the lust, of the eyes. It's that which is, the present, it's that which is seen, that which is, able to be, at this moment, physically seen.

And therefore, that's the limitation. That's the limit. The world is just concerned, with that. Now, we can ask a lot, by, um, putting it to ourselves, what am I most in love with?

Um, if, half of you tonight, had stayed behind, to watch, the Champions League, or something else, on television, and the question was asked, is that professing Christian worldly?

One would have to say, yes, at least at that particular moment. Why? Because you're loving something, more than being with God, and with God's people, and under the study of God's word, the opportunity that we have, once in the week, to do this.

[26 : 30] That means that for that moment, and in terms of that activity, that person is displaying, worldliness, and a worldly attitude of mind, because what they're really saying is, well, yes, I'm staying behind tonight, because I want to really see this, or making some excuse for it, perhaps.

But it comes to the same thing, the love of the world, rather than that, which is for the future, which is for the service of God, even in the present.

So, what is the love of the world? It's physical, rather than spiritual. It's sight, rather than faith, or the present, rather than the future God has, for his people. And thirdly, it's self, rather than the Father. Because he's saying now, thirdly, the pride of life. It's translated here, possessions. And that certainly comes into it, but it's wider than that.

So it's probably, again, better keeping it like the AV, the pride of life. It's life, in the word that's used here, it's for life, in the sense of, how you live your life, just know that, the life you presently have in this world.

[27 : 41] Everyday life, in other words, you could say. Everyday life, everyday things, your life in that sense. pride, and the word pride, has within it, the sense of, really almost, boasting in something, having a, great sense of achievement.

Pride of life. The world has a tremendous sense of achievement. Worldliness puffs out its chest all the time. That's part of what makes it worldly, and that's part of the distinctives of worldliness and being worldly.

It loves to show off. It loves to take pride in life, in the things of present achievements, or you might say possessions, or social status, or something that we've managed to actually do, and we think we've done it ourselves.

That's what the world is really so full of. And you see, that is so contrary to the spirit of a disciple. How does Jesus define what is a follower of his?

What is a disciple? If anyone will come after me, if anyone will be my disciple, let him deny himself. Let him take up his cross daily and follow me.

[29 : 06] John is writing in this very chapter about a new commandment that he's giving to them, although he's saying at the same time it's not a new commandment, it's an old commandment.

It's in terms of loving one another and putting other people ahead of yourself. Not putting yourself forward as if it's your own achievement that really is so important for people to see, but as you look out over that world, it's stuffed full of pride.

Pride! Because that's how the world really is. And God has redeemed us from pride. The pride of life.

Because pride is contrary to the spirit of a Christian. It's contrary to the spirit of Christ. What did he do? He made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant.

You follow Christ in the picture the gospel gives you of him. The account accurately that it gives you of him as he made his way, part of the way bearing his cross on the way to Calvary.

[30 : 17] And says to the disciples, As I have loved you, so you must love one another. You love one another by carrying your own cross.

By bearing one another's burdens. And not sticking your chest out and saying, I'm a die important. Look at me. That's the world.

That's the opposite of the life that John here is setting out for his readers, for the Christians that he's writing to. And, of course, that means that in terms of it being self rather than the father, he goes on to say, the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

That's another argument he's throwing in. And it fits in with the whole idea of the world just having a short-term vision of things, having a present-moment vision of things, living for what is seen, living for the physical.

What is all that? It's just like a snap of your finger compared to eternity. But whoever does the will of God abides forever.

[31 : 37] Now, there's something very interesting. If you take these three things together, physical rather than spiritual, sight rather than faith, and self rather than the father, you can find the three of them in Satan's temptation of our first parents in the Garden of Eden.

And you can find the exact same three in Satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. If you go back just briefly, let's just remind ourselves of what Genesis 3 says of it, and Genesis 3 and verse 6 especially, you find there these words, So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, physical, rather spiritual, and that was a delight to the eyes, what you see rather than what you believe in and don't see, she, and that it was desired to make one wise.

That's the third thing. It's self rather than God. Looking in on herself, this is going to make me wise. Even though it's contrary to what God commanded.

Three things. Physical, that's there for the sight, and that's there for self. And there it is. Exactly the way that the devil designed it, and she fell for it, and so did Adam.

Then when you go to the same, to temptation, the temptation of Jesus by the same agency of the devil, you can see there in the temptation the three things.

[33 : 33] First of all, the physical. Command these stones that they be made bread. Then he took them to show them all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and said, all these will I give you.

He showed it to him. He saw all these things. He was appealing to his sight rather than to his trust in God, and what was awaiting him in the future, having done the work that God the Father gave him to do.

And then thirdly, he actually said, cast yourself down off the pinnacle of the temple, for it is written he will give his angels charge over you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

And Jesus responded, that he was to depart from him. Well, these three things, the three elements are there in Christ's temptation and in the temptation of our first parents.

And of course, that's important because where we fell in Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ stood and stood effectively against the same power of Satan.

[34 : 42] But, just leave it at that, but just think of this. That means that there are two characteristics of worldliness that we must always bear in mind.

When you take the three things we've mentioned, the three aspects of it, it means that it comes down to having two characteristics. The first is, worldliness is demonic.

It is devilish. It is instigated by and inspired by Satan. Why is he called in the Bible the prince of this world?

Why is he called the God of this world? Because he is that. He is, in fact, the instigator of worldliness.

The instigator of that which is so contrary to God and to God's people and their well-being. Remember always that worldliness is inspired by Satan.

[35 : 44] It's to get you away from the opposite of it which is holiness. and obedience to God. Worldliness always has in it the element of the Satanic or the Satanic strategy.

The second characteristic is that it shows us that the world is anti-Christ. It is against Christ. It is not neutral to Christ.

Sometimes, you know, we think about our evangelism or our outreach and meeting people of the world. And you hear some people saying, there's such an apathy in the world.

Apathy means a kind of neutrality. They're neither for one thing or against it. They're neither for Christianity or against it. They're neither for Christ or against him.

They just couldn't care less. That's not true. You scratch the surface of a person's life. You get to their conscience and you'll soon see that the person who's really worldly is not neutral as far as Christ is concerned.

[36 : 51] They're very much anti. There is actually there in the heart. Far from it being an apathy or a neutrality, there is a hostility and a hatred.

Worldliness is anti-Christ. It is contrary to God, to the Lord and to his Lordship. Now we may come back and add to that but let's leave it like that for the moment.

The world is what is opposite to God and opposed to God and here it's a lifestyle that fits in with that being opposite to God.

And in that there are three aspects to it. It's physical rather than spiritual. It is sight rather than faith or the present rather than God's future and itself rather than the Father.

And it boils down to having these two characteristics that it always has the element of the satanic about it and it is also something that is decidedly anti-Christ and against Christ's kingdom and Christ's people.

[38 : 05] May God bless his word to us let's pray. Lord we pray that you would teach us increasingly of how important it is to know the world and its worldliness and while we know Lord that we cannot live in this life without interacting with the world without meeting with those who are of the world and without ourselves being concerned in that interaction and to reach them with the gospel and to seek to continue to witness to them.

Lord help us we pray always to be in the world but not of it and enable us to resist all the temptations that come our way from the world itself from its nature and from its attitude and from its seductiveness from the ways in which we have its very characteristics put before us so subtly. Lord we pray that you would constantly keep us mindful of these ways of the world. Give us grace we pray daily to go on with our life and trusting in you to look to the things which are unseen for they are the things which are eternal.

Hear our prayers Lord we pray now go before us and forgive our sin for Jesus sake Amen.