

What is the World, and How Has it Influenced Us?

Message 7 – “Final Thoughts”

1 John 2:15-17

Introduction: This morning we are going to draw our study of the world to a close, which means that I have several loose ends I need to address and hopefully I'll be able to pull them all together into a coherent whole. Last week we were looking at the issue of worldliness and personal convictions. We saw from what Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 8 that our focus whenever this issue arises should be on love for the other person rather than exercising our freedoms because of our knowledge of the situation. Remember the two platforms – love or knowledge. I also made the point that spiritual maturity and biblical knowledge aren't necessarily the same thing. Spiritual maturity is demonstrated not by how much you know but by making personal sacrifices for the sake of your fellow believers.

I also told you last week that I wanted to give you some practical illustrations of how this worked, so let me do that quickly. I hope you can appreciate that in the body of Christ there is quite a broad spectrum of acceptable and non-acceptable behaviors. In other words, you can find genuine followers of Christ who have no problem at all with participating in a particular activity, and you will find other genuine followers of Christ who won't do that particular thing because it is worldly. What is curious to me is that often times, this is geographically determined. For instance, if you were to spend some time with Christians in the Southeast, you would discover that there are lots of things they don't do down there that we do up here in the Northeast.

But I'll give you just a short list of activities that you can find believers opposed to as being worldly and then other believers that participate in them without any problem.

The use of alcohol as a beverage (cf. Jean Flansburg's question, "Do you think it is OK for a Christian to drink alcohol?")

Listening to Christian rock music	
The use of tobacco	Going to Shakespearian plays
Dancing	Watching television / going to
movies	
Bowling	Playing dominos
Playing cards	
Working on Sunday	

So the point we're working on here is, how are we supposed to deal with other Christians who don't see eye-to-eye with you when it comes to these various activities? And the answer is, "You follow Paul's advice in 1 Cor. 8." If you weren't here last week and missed that message, download it from the church web page and read it, or even listen to it, but it really is important for us to know how to deal with this matter.

Now, another issue I wanted to hit quickly was worldliness and the arts. Early on in this series someone asked me about this matter, so let's see what we can figure out. Unfortunately, to really adequately address this matter is impossible in a single message like this. Each of my children have taken a semester-long class in College that deals with this issue, so there is a lot to be said. But hopefully by giving you several broad statements that pertain to artistic expression in general, you will have some tools to work with in figuring this out.

The first one is that **God obviously has artistic flair**. All you have to do is look at one of the fabulous sunsets we have here at the foothills of the mountains, or look at the fall colors we are enjoying now and you can't help but conclude that God is interested in color, shape, dimension and expression. Read through the OT descriptions of the tabernacle and the colors involved and varieties of wood and different textures and precious metals – that is evidence of a God who appreciates artistic expression. If God

had wanted to, He could have created a one dimensional universe and humans who only saw in black and white and heard sounds only in one or two tones. But He didn't. The fact that He created us with the capacity to appreciate beauty and then placed us in a beautiful setting reflects His own artistic nature. So as humans, created in the image of God, it is natural for us to not only be drawn to artistic expression but also to desire to express ourselves artistically. The reason I'm making this point is because there are some Christians who believe that art is intrinsically worldly – that it is a part of the world system. I disagree completely.

The second broad statement I want to make is that **there is a significant difference between timeless art and pop art.** For instance, 200 years from now, are people going to be listening to Beethoven or Miley Cyrus? What do you think? There is a reason why some music is still listened to by great numbers of people 300 years after it was composed. That is the difference between timeless art and pop art. 50 years from now, people are going to be waiting in line and even willing to pay money to get into a museum that features works of Monet and Rembrandt. But nobody is going to see the works of Andres Serrano. Who is that? He's the guy who got his 15 minutes of fame on the world stage by taking a picture of a crucifix submerged in a jar of urine. He titled it "Piss Christ." That is the difference between high art and low art. High art is timeless and low art is transitory. And when you think about it, this principle is actually a reflection of one of our verses on the world – "the world is passing away." Godless art has no longevity.

The third comment I want to make about this matter is that the Bible actually gives us a **list of eight criteria to consider when assessing the art form** or subject you are interested in if you are wondering if it is worldly or not. It is Phil. 4:8 which gives you a list of qualifications you need to keep in mind. Here we read, "*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of*

good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.” There you have eight criteria for acceptable art.

Now the final loose end I want to hopefully bring to a close is to answer the basic question, “How do I know if this activity is worldly?” Ultimately, I think that is what we are all after. Or it may be, “How do I know if this decision demonstrates worldly thinking?” Even after we have looked at all these issues that have bearing on worldliness, we could still have some questions, so let me leave you with a reminder of what worldliness is, and then three final statements that will help you out in these situations.

First of all, worldliness is defined by John as *“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.”* We established the concept that “lust” as it is used here is a reference to a strong desire, so as we talk about worldliness what we are talking about is the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye, and the desires fueled by pride. Another way we could put it is that the lust of the flesh is our fleshly desires not brought under the control of the Spirit of God. The lust of the eyes is all your mental appetites not brought under the control of the Spirit. And the boastful pride of life is all the egotistical appetites we have that aren’t brought under the control of the Spirit.

But what does all this mean in practical terms? Here are three statements.

1. **When you focus on the temporal more than the eternal, you have been influenced by the world.** Let’s look again at 1 Jn. 2:17 - *“The world is passing away . . . but he who does the will of God will last forever.”* If you have a decision to make, or a course of action to choose, or are wondering about the legitimacy of some particular activity – ask yourself about the eternal significance of this activity or decision. And when you find yourself gravitating toward the temporal and shunning the eternal, that is worldly! Going back to

the case study about the teens taking jobs on weekends to help them pay for college, it removed them completely from church. Or the guys in the summer sport leagues that played on Sunday mornings. In other words, they were choosing college education over the explicit command of scripture to not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, or they were choosing to play softball instead of going to church. That is a worldly mindset – it is choosing the temporal over the eternal.

2. **When you focus on the external as opposed to the internal, you have been influenced by the world.** Turn with me quickly to 1 Pt. 3:3-4.

³ And let not your adornment be *merely* external-- braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; ⁴ but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

Here we have an explicit command to focus on the internal as opposed to the external. And while this is given specifically to women, it obviously applies to all followers of Christ. This ties in closely to the previous point because we all know the external is temporal. We aren't taking anything outside of us with us. That is why we shouldn't focus on it. So when we find ourselves preoccupied with or focusing on the external, we have been influenced by the world. This is why my personal opinion of the woman with such an extensive wardrobe was demonstrating worldliness. I often wonder how different her life would have been if she had invested as much time in spiritual pursuits as she did in purchasing and building and maintaining her wardrobe.

3. **When you focus on the physical as opposed to the spiritual, you have been influenced by the world.** Look with me at Col. 3:1-2. *"If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set*

your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” This sounds similar to the previous point, but I’m throwing it in because it shows us we have two different things we can focus on. Our focus in life can be either on heavenly things or on earthly things. What really strikes me about his passage is that our focus in life should be tied to our salvation. Paul starts with that word “if.”

I have a question for all you married women. How would you feel if your husband sent a birthday card and Christmas present to one of his former girlfriends every year? Oh, he loves you. He’s married to you. He’s had children to you, but every year on her birthday he sends her a card and a small gift every year at Christmas. Isn’t there something wrong with that picture? **YES!** The problem is that **you** should be where his focus lies. His previous girlfriends are a part of his previous life and now he has a new focus in life. That is Paul’s point in this passage. The world is a previous girlfriend, we are now in relationship with Christ exclusively, so that is where our focus should be. And when we find ourselves focusing on the physical as opposed to the spiritual, we have been influenced by the world.

Conclusion: By way of closing out this series, I want us to turn to a passage that should serve as a goal for each of us as we consider the question, “to what extent has the world influenced us.” It is found in Romans 12, and it is verse 2. *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

The command is very simple, don’t be conformed to the world. What does it mean to be conformed? I like the way the NLT translates this, *“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of the world.”* The goal is to be transformed by bringing your thinking into alignment with God’s thinking. And as we do this, we will be able to determine whether or not our actions and decisions are worldly or not.

So as we go back to the church in Laodicea that had been so strongly influenced by the world, we don't want to be that church. How are we going to accomplish that objective? By insuring that our thinking is in line with God's thinking as revealed in His Word.