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## MEANING OF "THE WORLD" AND TWO OPPOSING SYSTEMS

### Introduction

We have been considering the significance of what has been accomplished at the Cross and a very significant aspect of what has been accomplished at the Cross is that it provides the foundational basis for us to overcome the world. To have a good understanding of this subject, it is important for us to have a clearer understanding of the nature of the problem and the various aspects of the difficulties involved.

In the previous message, we looked at the manifestation of the spirit of the world in the work environment, in the world of business, in politics, art, literature, music, songs, movies, fashion and in sports and games.

We shall cover AR220 in two parts. In this first part, AR220a, we will seek to understand the meaning of "the world" and the existence of two opposing systems. In the second part, AR220b, we will look at one particular problem area that we face in this world - the issue of relationship with the opposite sex, sex and related issues.

### Meaning of "the world"

The Scriptures uses the expression "the world" in different senses. Understanding the different ways it is used can help us appreciate why, on the one hand, the apostle John tells us the world was made through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:10) and that God loves the world (John 3:16), and on the other, that we should not love the world (1 John 2:15).

#### *Reference to God's creation and people*

"The world" can be used to refer to God's creation generally, for instance in John 1:9-10:

#### **John 1:9-10**

9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

Its use in "coming into the world" (v. 9), "He was in the world" (v. 10) and "the world was made through Him" (v. 10) refers to the Lord Jesus coming into this world that He has created, and this includes its inhabitants. Its use in "the world did not know

Him" (v. 10) refers primarily to the people inhabiting this earth. The third reference to "the world" in verse 10 has the same meaning as "the world" in John 3:16.

**John 3:16**

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

It is clear that "the world" in this verse refers to people because the verse goes on to say "whoever believes in Him shall not perish". The word "whoever" in this verse can only refer to people.

*Reference to the world system*

The Scriptures also often uses "the world" with a rather strong, negative connotation, as in 1 John 2:15, where the apostle John tells us not to love the world and that if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us. Likewise, the apostle James tells us in James 4:4 that friendship with the world is hostility toward God. This is the meaning of "the world" we will be concentrating on in this series of messages on "Overcoming the World".

Used in this negative sense, "the world" refers to the state of affairs in the fallen world under the influence and power of the evil one. The evil one exerts an extremely powerful influence indeed, as he is the "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), and in a sense, the whole world lies in his power (1 John 5:19). Behind the scene, he shapes the trends, values, direction, perspective and approach of fallen men, encouraging them to indulge in the desires of the flesh.

This is the "course of this world" that Ephesians 2 alludes to:

**Ephesians 2:1-3**

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,  
2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world,  
according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now  
working in the son of disobedience.  
3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh,  
indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind...

Paul says that before we become believers in Christ, we "formerly walked according to the course of this world". By that, he meant that we once lived under the influence of the evil one and of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Such a life is characterised by the lusts of the flesh, with men indulging themselves in the desires of the carnal flesh and mind (v. 3).

"The course of this world" has a negative spiritual dimension. This was what I referred to in the previous message as "the spirit of the world". This spiritual dimension is contributed by the presence of the evil one and the powers of darkness

at work, and by the negative spirit of men, whose wrongful desires cause them to succumb to the temptations of the evil spirits. The spirit of the world exerts a negative influence on our spirit, our spiritual appetite and our values. Its direction, values and approach are opposed to those of God's kingdom. It is characterised by aggressiveness, arrogance, materialism, self-centredness, man-centredness, a fixation on the visible and temporal realm, and rebellion against God. Under this system, the whole approach to life starts with man, his own thinking and ways, and the wisdom and capabilities of the natural man, rather than with God, what is in God's heart and dependence on Him.

The apostle John refers to such an approach to life as "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16); all these flow forth from the flesh and from walking according to the flesh. He also declares that this whole system, with its negative spirit, direction, values and approach, is passing away. In contrast, God is building His eternal kingdom.

### **1 John 2:15-17**

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

### *Friendship with the world vs friends in this world*

As we focus on the negative meaning of "the world", let us be clear that not everything that is in this world or taking place in this world is negative. There are various things occurring in this world that are pleasing to God; these are not part of the negative sense of "the world" that we are considering.

While "friendship with the world" is always wrong as it involves aligning our hearts in the direction of the trend, values, spirit and approach of the world (James 4:4), it does not follow that we cannot have friends in this world, including non-Christian friends. God calls us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He wants us to be His witnesses and to have a positive influence on the lives of the non-believers. How can we have a positive influence on the people of this world if we isolate ourselves from them? There is a proper place to befriend others whether Christians or non-Christians, but we need to be prayerful and wise so that this area of our relating with others has a positive direction and outcome.

### **God's eternal kingdom**

Contrary to the world system in which the evil one exercises a powerful influence, God is building an eternal kingdom in which He reigns and in which His values and

ways pervade and prevail.

The kingdom of God is characterised by the virtues of truth, love, purity, holiness, meekness, righteousness and justice. Only men who are redeemed and washed by the blood of the Son of God have a part in this kingdom. They are the ones who have a repentant and contrite spirit, and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. They seek to live a life of faith in God and in what He has revealed. They endeavour to abide by the truth, values and principles of God's kingdom, according to the guidance and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Such believers put no confidence in the flesh. They are not self-centred or man-centred; instead they are God-centred and live with an eternal perspective. Those who live in this way will find true fulfilment, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit; theirs will be a life of fruitfulness and usefulness.

As believers, we are God's children and citizens of His kingdom. We have been bought with a price – the precious blood of the Lord Jesus shed at the Cross – and we belong to God. We must commit ourselves to God and live according to His ways, not the ways of the world. This is the reason why God warns us through the apostles James and John not to love the world or to enter into friendship with the world and become enemies of God.

### **Two opposing systems in operation**

There are two opposing systems that operate with God's permission. One is "the world" under the power and influence of the evil one; the other is God's kingdom under the sovereign rule of God. These two systems are not merely different in their approach and emphasis; they are in opposition to each other. And at the heart of it are spiritual and moral issues.

With regard to spiritual issues in God's kingdom, the great and good God is the supreme ruler, and our submission and loyalty are to Him whereas in "the world", the evil one holds sway over men with his power, influence and dominion.

With regard to moral issues, light, truth, righteousness and goodness are upheld in God's kingdom whereas in "the world", darkness, unrighteousness, evil and sin are rife.

So when we love the world and are friends of the world, we are in reality aligning ourselves with the world and saying "yes" to the temptations of the evil one, thus opposing God, His values and ways, and what He is seeking to do. The world and God's kingdom are diametrically opposed.

Thus the strong denouncement of the world by the apostles James and John are meant to help us see the issues sharply and realise their gravity.

However, it does not mean that whenever we are influenced by the world or have allowed the world to influence our lives, we no longer love God and instead have

become enemies of God. We must not make such a hasty conclusion about ourselves or other believers. Conversely, even though we say we love God, it does not mean that there is therefore no trace of love for the world in us.

### **Purging the world from our hearts**

In reality, there is often a mixture of both aspects in our hearts. We love God, but we have also allowed the world to creep into our lives and influence us in some ways. In fact, we can say that all of us fail in this area to varying degrees.

To the degree we love the world in the negative sense, to that degree we do not love God. We cannot say, "I love the Lord but I also love the world and I keep these two issues separated so that they have no bearing on each other." This is not possible. Whenever the world comes into our lives, it will have an immediate negative effect on our relationship with God and on the quality of our love for God.

The presence of the world in our hearts is a very serious matter because it hits at the root of our relationship with God. We cannot cling to the world and yet profess that we want to deepen our love for God and our relationship with Him. Clinging to the world will be a significant hindrance to the nurturing of the quality of our relationship with God and love for Him.

We must therefore be resolute to deal with the root of the problem of the world in our hearts. Let us ask God to help us deal with it thoroughly and decisively, purging it from our hearts.

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