

Week 3 - Dealing with the World

Monday

Scripture Reading: 1 John 1:8-9

“If therefore anyone cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared unto every good work.” (2 Timothy 2:21)

Dealing with the World

God wants to make us useful vessels in His hands. However, there are certain things that hinder this from being accomplished in us. Many of these things are not easily detected. Thus, many young people do not understand why they are not going on spiritually. Have you ever asked yourself why you often feel that you have no strength to serve God? If you want to serve Him and know that He wants to use you, why is there a problem?

In the previous chapter we saw that sins are one of the barriers that hinder God's work in us. Sins can be compared to stains of black ink on white clothes. Many times we do not realize that we are filled with the stains of our sins because we are in darkness. In order to see our sins, we need God's light. Therefore, fellowship with God is essential in order for us to identify our sins. When we seek to have intimate fellowship with God, spontaneously every hindrance between us and Him will be exposed. Through fellowship we are enabled to see all of our "filthiness" and be cleansed from it. Once the "spots" are identified, the best way to get them out is to confess our sins. When we confess our sins, we give God a way to continue His work in us.

Knowing the World

In order for us to be fully useful to the Lord as vessels unto honor, there are other things from which we must be purified. A big obstacle that hinders many young people from consecrating themselves is their attraction to the world. What is the world? Why is the world so attractive to the young people? How can we deal with the world in our life? Sometimes we cannot clearly differentiate between the world and sins although we see that there are different implications when we deal with these two problems.

Difference between Sin and the World

Both sin and the world defile man, but there is a difference between them. The defilement of sin is gross, but that of the world is more refined. The defilement of sin is like a stain of black ink on a white shirt. The defilement of the world is like a beautiful, colored design on the same shirt. Anyone would condemn the stained shirt but would appreciate the brightly colored shirt. However, God wants a pure, white shirt with no stains, filth or colors other than white. Regarding sin, it damages and defiles man; regarding the world, it not only defiles man but also takes possession of him.

Key Point:

Defile

Your Key Point:

Question:

What differences are there between the defilements of sin and the world?

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Tuesday

Scripture Reading: James 1:13-15; Gen. 4:16

“And Jehovah God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skins and clothed them.” (*Genesis 3:21*)

Sins

Sins are only the first step of the long road that leads man away from God. Sins are conceived in our mind (James 1:13-15) and after they are conceived, they produce death. However, the world is more subtle and damaging than sins are. The world not only defiles and corrupts man but also usurps him and causes him to depart from God. Sin is against God's law, but the world is even worse because it is against the Person of God; it is against God Himself.

When Adam sinned, he was corrupted and defiled by sin. This defilement became a genetic disease which spread to all of mankind. Although Adam had committed such a great offense, he was still within God's reach; he was still in the garden of Eden within the sphere of God's care. Thus God could say to him, "Adam, where are you?" Adam was trying to hide from God, but because he was still within the realm of God's care, it was impossible for him to hide. Because Adam was still there, God could provide a way to recover him and redeem him. God made coats of skins for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21), indicating that blood, which typified redemption, had been shed.

In contrast, when Cain sinned the result was tragic. Genesis 4:16 says, "And Cain went forth from the presence of Jehovah..." Here we see a crucial difference. After Adam sinned, he remained in God's presence and was therefore able to be recovered by Him. It was not like that with Cain. Cain and his descendants went out from the presence of God and established a civilization without God. This is what happens when someone allows himself to be controlled by the world. Once Cain went out from the presence of God, he knew his wife, conceived a son and eventually built a city; and he did all this without God!

The Bible is very serious when it speaks about the world. We must be aware of how serious this is! The world not only wants to damage and defile you, it wants to make you leave God's presence so that you will lose God and become useless to Him. The world is against God and puts itself in His place. Do not forget: sin is against God's law but the world is against God Himself.

If the world is against God, why do we not see this clearly? The world's influence on us is very subtle and hardly noticeable. This is why many young Christians do not realize that they are being attracted by the world. The influence of the world in their life is much more dangerous than the influence of sin, precisely because of the fact that they are not aware of it.

Something that happened in my house is a good illustration of this. I am used to going to bed late. One day it was almost one in the morning and I was reading. All of a sudden I had such a bad headache that I was about to faint. I asked myself, "What is happening?" I thought maybe it was the gas. I went to the kitchen to make sure that the gas was turned off and it was, but it was still coming out. Then I discovered that there was a little opening because of a crack in the gas tank. I phoned the caretaker and we took the tank and put it in an empty place near the building. Then I went to check on my wife and children. They were stupefied under the effects of the gas and had headaches. Thank the Lord that I was awake. What if we had all been sleeping? This is how the world is. It comes into our home, into our mind and into our life in a very subtle way, clouding us and killing us little by little. It comes in more and more without us realizing it and when we wake up, it is too late. We have been occupied, usurped and possessed by the world and there is no opportunity for God to do anything. Although the world works in a way that is hardly noticeable, the damages it causes can be irreparable.

Key Point:

The world is against God

Your Key Point:

Question:

In what ways is the world worse than sin?

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Wednesday

Scripture Reading: Gen. 4:17-22

“Adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever determines to be a friend of the world is constituted an enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

The Beginning of the World

Before the fall of man, all his basic needs were supplied by God. All his vital necessities, whether biological, psychological or spiritual, were provided by God. Food, protection, dwelling and enjoyment were all supplied by God so that man could live well on the earth. Many think that God created man to live as an inanimate object without feeling, happiness, pleasure or life. But that is not what is revealed in the Bible. Rather, after God created man, He placed him in the garden of Eden. Eden is a word which signifies "pleasure." God was concerned for man's satisfaction and in such a pleasant place, He supplied everything he needed.

However, when man went away from God, starting with Cain and his descendants, what happened? Cain went out from the presence of Jehovah and automatically lost all the provision that came from God. Then a civilization without God had to arise. After Cain came out of God's presence he was afraid and said, "What will become of my life?" He was worried because he would now have to supply all his basic needs by himself. He needed protection, enjoyment and sustenance, which he would have had if he had remained in God's presence.

Cain's descendants continued this pursuit and thereby began to raise cattle, live in tents, play the flute for enjoyment and make weapons out of iron and bronze for defense (Gen. 4:17-22). We see that all these things were invented as substitutes for the provision they would have had if they had remained under God's care. At this point, men were replacing God to the extent of becoming absolutely independent of Him. This was the embryonic stage of what the Bible calls the world.

What is the World?

In order to keep man away from God, Satan has systematized, organized and planned all of man's activities to form the world. World in Greek is kosmos, and signifies a system or organization. This system was for the purpose of occupying man with his own needs so that he would not have time for God or care for His interests. This is very subtle because, on one hand, man needs to be concerned about his food, dwelling, entertainment, protection, and so on; but, on the other hand, being too worried about these things causes him to become enslaved by them. Eventually, man's life is consumed with things that are in excess of his needs. When this occurs, everything is more important than God. For this reason Jesus said to those who wanted to follow Him, that if anyone loved his wife, child, house, mother, father, etc, more than Him, he was not worthy to be called His disciple. If someone wants to be a disciple of Christ, he must put Him in the first place. Consequently, whenever any activity, person or thing takes the place of God, that thing becomes the world to us.

This matter is very serious. When Satan can separate someone from God by occupying him with other things and making those things his world, God has no way of working in him directly. Something like this happened to an acquaintance of mine. He was a poor young man and we, his friends, did not understand why he always wore the best clothes and the best shoes. We asked ourselves, "How can he afford to buy those things?" Soon afterwards, we discovered that he was involved with immoral people who bought him with gifts. Unfortunately, his ways did not allow him to go back and the last thing we heard about him was that he had contracted a serious illness (which was probably AIDS – at that time this disease had not yet been identified).

This story shows us exactly how the world works in a person. This young person received new clothes, new shoes, new cars, and even an apartment. These things were given to him little by little with a very well defined goal: to attract him to "a better world," far from poverty. The world begins to come into our life in a hidden way, subtly and gradually causing us to become entangled, until we are carried away from God.

Key Point:

Enslaved

Your Key Point:

Question:

How does Satan enslave people?

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Thursday

Scripture Reading: 1 John 2:15-17

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15)

Anything Can be the World (1)

A. Drinking and Professional Careers

There are young people that do not want to know anything. They don't want to study or work. They prefer to be in a bar talking and drinking. There is a young man like this in the building where I live. When he gets up in the morning he goes directly to the bar and has a beer for breakfast and has another one at lunchtime. When we meet him in the elevator he smells like beer. Because he is so involved with drinking, he was led into living an immoral life. Drinking is his world. He has been occupied, usurped and consumed by drinking.

Unlike this young man, whose neighbors warned their daughters to stay away from him, there is another young man in our building that any parent would want their daughter to marry. He is a diligent student who finished high school when he was sixteen and university when he was twenty-one. He did his master's degree when he was twenty-four and now, at twenty-five, he is doing his PhD. He surely has a promising future. When he finishes his doctorate he will have many offers for work with excellent salaries. Compared to the young man that we described earlier, this young person is much better. However, he also is being occupied, usurped and consumed by another department of the world: a brilliant professional career.

Unfortunately, this last story describes the experience of many Christian young people. After they receive the Lord Jesus, they seek Him with all their heart, meet with other young people to study the Bible and boldly speak about Jesus. However, later they get into the "good stream" of a profession, of struggling for their living, and eventually are also usurped and become separated from the things of God.

How many Christians today are being usurped by their jobs simply because they have received a bigger chair or desk with an acrylic plaque which has "Manager" or "Director" on it? As far as God is concerned, they have been usurped because of the plaque and even separated from their families. Some people have "sold their own soul" because of a position, which oftentimes represents an increase of a mere ten percent of their former salary. They go to work at six in the morning and leave at eleven at night. They work on Saturday, Sunday and also during holidays, just because they are the "boss." They no longer care for their families and as far as the church is concerned, they don't even remember that they are Christians. Now they are "married" to their job. Their world is their position in their company.

I say this because I have seen many young people in the past that have testified that they lived completely for the Lord and for His church, but they were deceived by Satan and today are very far from God. The one who systematized the world is very subtle. Knowing that he could not defile all the young people with sins, what did he do? He used good things that were inoffensive and attractive to ensnare them. He used studies and brilliant professional careers to occupy the young people in such a way that when they come to the meetings, their thoughts are far away, busy thinking about business, investments or their studies. God continues to speak, but they cannot hear Him because other "gods" are speaking more loudly to them in their hearts.

Key Point:

Deceived

Your Key Point:

Question:

How can we take care of our human living without being ensnared by the world?

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Friday

Scripture Reading: Acts 9:15

“And do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect.” (*Romans 12:2*)

Anything Can be the World (2)

B: Music

Many young people, because they are not concerned about God's things, have been usurped by worldly music to the point that they cannot sleep without listening to it. They walk, eat lunch, study and sleep with earphones on. They know all the words, all the musical groups and all the singers. But when they sing in the church meetings, they are like mummies: indifferent, with no feeling or reaction to the words of the hymns. They can spend hours and hours listening to and singing songs that they don't know the meaning of, but they cannot appreciate the hymns that speak about God's love. This happens because their lips and hearts are filled with worldly music. If we are not occupied with the things of God, the things of the world will come in to occupy our mind.

Actually, most of the young people like music and it is true that God can use music to speak to us. Why don't they use the musical potential they have to make music and hymns for God? Why don't they use their time to appreciate and enjoy music that can help them in their spiritual experiences?

C. Fashion

Another thing that has usurped the young people from God's presence is fashion. I read a report about businesses that are successful in the midst of the present economic crisis. Among those mentioned, the businesses that stand out are the ones that produce fashion for young people. Why is this? Some of the young people that were interviewed said that they spend a whole month's pay on clothes. Others spend their money to buy a pair of shoes or a pair of running shoes. This is happening because of the meaningless life the young people are living, fully apart from God's purpose. They spend their entire paycheck so that they will not be different from the other young people who, like them, are living insipid, materialistic, consumer lives. There is nothing wrong with buying clothes or shoes, but everything that exceeds one's daily needs becomes his world. For them to give everything they have to get these things shows how empty they are.

The Example of the Orange

Just like an orange, you can be depleted by the world. The world sucks out your "juice," everything that is precious in you: your youth, your vitality and your intelligence. Eventually, when your vitality is gone and the world throws you away, like the orange peel, it says to you, "Now you can serve God..." If you live a wasteful life, spending money on things that are not essential and eating the wrong kind of food, you may become sick and have to depend on medicine and tranquilizers. How can you serve God like that? Of course, even in a situation like that, you can still receive God's salvation, but Satan has gained his objective, which is to make you useless as far as serving God is concerned.

If you realize that your life is that way, or that you are going in that direction, don't wait to become "an orange peel" and then serve the Lord. The Potter wants you now, in the fullness of your life. This does not mean that you should not study or work; quite the opposite. You should study and work in order to be a useful vessel

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in the hands of your Owner. Study and give the best of yourself; not to be somebody important in the world, but to be useful to God. God needs young people to be His vessels unto honor, young people who are different wherever they are, whether in the universities or in companies. He needs young people that know clearly that God put them there as chosen vessels to bring the name of the Lord to people.

The Example of Paul

Paul studied at the feet of Gamaliel. This can be compared to studying at the University of Oxford today. Thus, Paul's education was the best anyone could have received. At that time this was only possible for the most respectable and wealthy families. The apostle Peter himself acknowledged Paul's wisdom saying, "Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him...things...hard to understand" (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Furthermore, Paul spoke several languages. On one occasion he spoke in a Hebrew dialect used in Palestine (Acts 21:40; 22:2), after having spoken in Greek (21:37). He probably spoke Latin because he possessed Roman citizenship (22:27-28). Paul mentioned excerpts from the poets Aratus and Cleanthes in his discourse in the Areopagus, where the cultured people of Athens used to gather, showing that he knew Greek literature (Acts 17:28). All of this was possible because Paul was a vessel prepared by the Lord to be useful in His hands (9:15).

Key Point:

Chosen vessel

Your Key Point:

Question:

When do things that we need become the world to us?

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Saturday

Scripture Reading: James 4:4; Rom. 12:2

“In which you once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience;” (*Ephesians 2:2*)

How Should We Deal with our Relationship with the World? (1)

A. Know God

Many are not aware of the influence of the world simply because they do not know God. If someone does not know God he will not know what is against God and consequently will not recognize what is taking the place of God in his life. James 4:4 says, "Adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever determines to be a friend of the world is constituted an enemy of God." Here we see clearly that the world is against God's Person. We are either friends of God or friends of the world. We cannot be friends of both at the same time. If we want to deal with our relationship with the world, we must firstly know God.

If we do not know God, we have no standard to direct us; we have no terms of reference. We cannot clearly define what is the world and what is not the world. For some, the world may be certain things that take God's place in their life, but for others these same things may not be the world to them. It may be that you do not identify yourself with any of the examples given previously. Can you prove that you are not being usurped by any thing, activity or person? The way to answer this question is by having fellowship with God. Ask the Lord, "Lord Jesus, Is there anything that takes me away from You?" Is there something that has taken Your place in me?" By having sincere fellowship with God, divine light will come into your heart and you will be able to realize how you are with God in reality.

The more fellowship we have with God, the more sensitive we will be to His life within. The more we know Him, the more we will love Him and will know His will. Our capacity to recognize what is taking the place of God in our life and what is taking us away from His presence will increase. It is through fellowship with God that we will discover what the world is to us because the divine light will enlighten us. If we love the world, we will have a clear inward sense that we are short of the enjoyment of God's love because the world is against Him and has taken His place.

In order to deal with and find a solution to your relationship with the world, you need to ask, "How is my love for the Lord?" If you love God with all your heart, the world will not have any place in you. But how can you love Him if you do not know Him? And how can you know Him if you do not have fellowship with Him? Hence, the starting point in dealing with the world is to have fellowship with God.

B. Do Not be Fashioned According to This Age

We should take note that the world has an appearance to which it would like to conform us. Romans 12:2 says, "And do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind." Here the word translated as age is *aion*, and can be translated as "era," an age, a determined period of time.

When we speak about the world we are speaking about it in a general way, but when we speak about the age, we are referring to the section of the world in which we live and which affects us directly. We can compare the "ages" of the world to the different departments in a big store. The departments are organized to take care of

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every kind of person with their different tastes and needs. When someone goes to one of these stores, he is related to it through its many departments. Some may go to the modern clothes department while others go to the department of a more traditional style and still others go to the department of electric appliances. All these departments belong to the store and through them the store is able to reach the clients. In the same way, the world reaches people by means of the ages.

We can also compare the world to the segments of the current of a long river. You cannot be on the whole river. If you are on the bank, the part of the river that passes close to you is what may be called the "age" of the river. The course of the world began with Cain, passed through Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, Egypt and Babylon, until it arrived at our present time. Every century, every period, and even every decade has an age. These "ages" have been systematized and organized by Satan to determine what people should or should not do. Many people get into this "current" and are carried along by it without realizing it. Ephesians 2:2 says that we also once walked "according to the age of this world." It is worth mentioning that what the world decides we should be, think, wear, eat, listen to, etc., is very strong. This is why we must be careful to not be influenced and carried along by it.

To prevent this from happening we must know the will of God. Just as when someone knows God he will not be a friend of the world, if anyone knows the will of God he will not be conformed to the world's present "age."

Paul warned the saints in Rome to not be conformed to that age; they should not take on the appearance of that age. Today in this age, the world also has its appearance. If we had not been warned, we would easily offer our body to the things of this "age" and become accustomed to them. For this reason Paul showed that our mind needs to be renewed and we need to be transformed in order to experience what the will of God is. If we do not do this, our mind will easily be conformed to the things of this age.

Key Point:

Knowing God

Your Key Point:

Question:

How can we know God?

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Sunday

Scripture Reading: 1 Jn. 2:15-17; 2 Tim. 4:10; 2 Tim. 2:22

“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Choosing rather to be ill treated with the people of God than to have the temporary enjoyment of sin,” (*Hebrews 11:24-25*)

How Should We Deal with our Relationship with the World? (2)

C. Do Not Love the Things in the World

The world is against God and the things of the world are against the will of God. In 1 John 2:15-17 we see this in a very clear way: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him; because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and its lust, but he who does the will of God abides forever." What are the things that are in the world? The apostle John has divided them into three categories: the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life. These things are against the will of God. If we are involved with them and conformed to them, we will not be able to know or do the will of God. Our mind needs to be renewed (Rom. 12:2) so that we can know the will of God and reject the things that are in the world.

Demas, who was one of the apostle Paul's co-workers, "loved the world," that is, he loved the present age. As a consequence, he abandoned Paul (2 Tim. 4:10). Here it does not say that he committed a grave sin but that he loved the present age, he loved the world. Thus he was usurped by the world and became useless in God's work. The ultimate goal of the world's influence in our life is to make us useless to God! The example of Demas is a serious warning to us.

D. Reject the World

Unlike sin, the world is outside of us. Our mind is constantly being bombarded by the "attractions of the world." When we realize that something of the world, whether an idea or an activity that is separating us from God, is trying to "implant" itself in us, we must reject it quickly before we are influenced by it.

In Hebrews 11:24-25 we see the example of Moses. He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and refused the temporary enjoyment of sin. Rather, he left Egypt. This shows us that we cannot "negotiate" with the world as if the world and God could dwell in us simultaneously. We must take a strong stand to reject the world. We must not be like many young people that have said, "There's no problem; I'm strong. Do you think I'm going to leave the Lord because of that? Don't worry..." Today they are like Demas. Moses left Egypt and Paul told Timothy to flee youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22). Be like Moses and Timothy.

By having more fellowship with God and rejecting the world, our love for God as well as our spiritual life will grow, and we will no longer be attracted by the things in the world. In this way we can become useful vessels in the hands of the Lord. Hallelujah!

Key Point:

Reject

Your Key Point:

Question:

What enabled Moses and Timothy to be able to reject the world?

Additional Reading

Enrich your reading of the Daily Food by simultaneously reading the books suggested below:

Love Not the World – Watchman Nee