

## In but Not of the World

John 17:13-19

The three great enemies of the Christian Life are the world, the flesh and the Devil. These enemies are identified throughout the New Testament. For example, there is John's warning about the world in 1 John 2:15-17, "Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." Paul addresses the problems of the flesh in Romans 7 and 8, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God." And, Peter's warning is also of note, (1 Pet. 5:8) "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

These enemies are not only identified individually as above. They are also put together in order that we might see the relationship between them as in Eph. 2:1-3 "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once conducted ourselves in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."

So what is the meaning of these terms and how do they show up in our lives?

Our flesh is the natural appetites and desires that God has given to us but that are now ruined by sin so that they "take us over" and put us in bondage to them. Addictions, excesses, and sexual immorality are examples of sins of the flesh.

The world in Scripture is a man centered view of life that specifically excludes God from having any significance to us or from having any influence upon our thinking or behavior. Peer pressure is an example of worldliness whether it is evidenced among Jr. High students or a senior ladies bridge club. Materialism, Consumerism, and obsessions with popularity, fashion, money and power are evidences of worldliness.

The Devil is the tempter as in the garden when he was able to convince Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He is also Peter's roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He accuses the brethren and seeks to deceive in order to take advantage of our vulnerabilities. He is the enemy of God, first. We are only a means to an end for him. His aim, is always to destroy us. This is the opposite of God's aim, which is to bless us.

Jesus' teaching also speaks directly to the problems posed by these three enemies. In the parable of the sower the seed that falls by the wayside represents the activity of the Devil in taking away the word. The seed that falls on stony ground and springs up but then has no root and withers away is akin to the flesh which is characterized by impetuous attractions to any stimulation but with no ability to commit or resist instant gratification. The there is the seed that falls among the weeds and is choked by them. Jesus likened the weeds to the world which chokes (replaces and leaves no room for) the truth of the word.

On another occasion Jesus told the stories of lost things; the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. The sheep is lost because it wanders away. This is the problem of the flesh - impulsive and distracted. The coin is lost because of carelessness. This is the problem of the world which infiltrates our life and thinking so that the values and practices of the world replace godliness before we even know what has happened. The son was lost by means of his own rebellious spirit. And it is the Devil who is constantly wrestling with God over control of His world. If you are resisting the Holy Spirit, trying to stay in control of your own life this is rebellion and your enemy, the devil, is in it for your defeat and destruction.

Notice also that when Jesus called His followers to a specific and greater discipleship, He put it this way, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny

himself (rather than give in to the flesh), and take up his cross (the cross is the self-sacrifice of the devout, the opposite of anything that makes sense to the world) and follow Me (rather than the Devil).

So, Jesus knew that being in the world but not of the world would present many difficulties for His disciples. Ananias and Saphira had a worldly outlook as they attempted to use a gift to the church to secure position and power. The Corinthian church had many struggles of the flesh seen in obsession with food and sex. We could also see the Devil as a root cause of the Philippians struggles with unity and with so many who wanted to fight about who was in charge of this or that.

So, Jesus prayed for us in view of His concern for we who are not of the world but who still live in the world. He wants us to have His joy. The source of His joy was His utter commitment to the Father's will, His faith in the father's integrity, and His certainty that the Father will triumph in the end - which will then be all that matters.

He prayed with the awareness that there is an alienation between word and world. The word conveys God's truth. The world rejects His truth. Think of the 10 commandments. Worship the one true God. Don't make any graven images. Don't take God's name in vain. Keep the Sabbath. Honor your parents. Don't murder. Don't steal. Don't commit adultery. Don't lie. Don't covet. These are commandments rather than suggestions and the positive side of the commandments is that they teach us how to love God and how to love our neighbor. But the world rejects the word and hates the commandments. The world chafes at everyone of them. They say there are many paths to God, that you should be able to express your worship as you please, that no special respect of God is needed, that parents are more curse than blessing, that abortion is a mother's right, that marriage is just a piece of paper, that taking from the rich is the way to care for the poor, that you have to lie sometimes and that we should all have a house and a car and fancy clothing just like our neighbor. But those who so casually reject the commandments create a world of chaos. They know nothing of love for God or neighbor.

Jesus prayed then for protection from the evil one rather than for isolation from the world. We cannot be isolated from the world when we are called to change the world. Neighbors and friends need to witness the peace and harmony that your faith and your Savior bring into your life. The chaos and frustration of their own lives will surface. You won't need to prove it. Let Jesus give you victory over the enemies. Put them in front of Him. Seek His help. He can help you. He can heal you. He can lift you to a life that knows Him and experiences His joy.