

Christians and the World

by Phil Beach Jr.

Phil Beach Jr. emphasizes the need for Christians to navigate the world without succumbing to its corrupting influences, focusing instead on the heavenly kingdom and God's glory.

Scripture: John 15:18, John 18:36, 1 Corinthians 7:30, Colossians 3:1, James 4:4, 1 John 5:4, 1 John 5:18

Topics: "Worldliness", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Phil Beach Jr. preaches on the importance of followers of Jesus guarding against the devil's tricks to seduce them into falling away from devotion to the Lord, emphasizing that all wrongdoing is sin and those born of God do not practice sin. He highlights the need to view the world through the lens of God's Word to avoid falling into corruption and disobedience like the nation of Israel. Parents are urged to teach their children God's truth about the world to prevent spiritual corruption. Followers of Jesus are called to resist the world's temptations, not love the world or its ways, and be prepared to be hated by the world for their allegiance to Christ.

Transcript

John, the beloved apostle and bondservant of the Lord Jesus makes a profound statement in his epistle. He is addressing New Testament followers of Jesus and warning them to guard against the devil's many tricks intended to seduce them into falling away from devotion to the Lord. Addressing this issue he says, "All wrongdoing is sin...We know that anyone born of God does not practice committing sin, but The One who was begotten of God carefully watches over and protects him [Christ's divine presence within him preserves him against the evil], and the wicked one does not lay hold of him or touch him.

We know that we are of God and the whole world is under the power of the wicked one" (1 John 5:18). In this article I will be addressing the world, as it relates to all around us that is under the power of the wicked one. Of course, the physical world, God's creation, is not evil and can be admired by the Christian. Having said that, it is imperative that we view this evil world and its corrupt ways according to the teachings of the Word of God. Much harm is occurring today because many are no longer seeing the world as under the power of the evil one.

Because of this, they are embracing the world and the things in it and are falling away from devotion to the Lord and His holiness. In the Old Testament, God told the nation of Israel to make no connections, alliances or peace treaties with the nations He was driving out from before them. Instead, God commanded them to destroy their influence from among themselves and to have nothing to do with their

gods or their practices. Unfortunately, God's people did not obey the Lord and embraced the things God told them to destroy.

Because of their disobedience, their spiritual lives were corrupted and they suffered God's judgment. Parents have a great responsibility to be sure to teach their children exactly what God says about the world. I recommend that every family use this study as a devotional and be sure to clearly explain to their children its vital truth. It would be good to go through each point, slowly and prayerfully and generate discussion. Let's carefully and prayerfully consider what God's Word says about this world we live in and allow His Word to be our guide to keep us from being defiled by touching the unclean ways and practices of this age.

Be sure to read all the scripture references at the beginning of each section. We will first look at Jesus and the nature of His kingdom as well as His response when offered the kingdoms of this world by the devil. Then, we will consider what God's Word says about the way a follower of Jesus is to view the world. JESUS REFUSED THE WORLD WHEN THE DEVIL OFFERED IT TO HIM (MATTHEW 4:8-11) During the time when Jesus was led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, He was offered all the kingdoms of the world, together with all their glory, splendor, magnificence, preeminence and excellence (Amp).

This incident, which occurred at the very beginning of the public ministry of our Lord, shows us the proper view we should take when offered the world's glory. Jesus flatly refused this temptation and resisted the devil. By this action, He is teaching all those who follow Him to do the same. We are called to seek the glory and honor of God and to seek first His kingdom. In His kingdom, the glory and honor is centered on the Son of God and not on men. But in the kingdoms of the earth, the glory and honor is always focused on men, their earthly wisdom and accomplishments.

Today, many are falling prey to the devil's offer to possess the kingdoms of this world. Even within Christendom, many are no longer seeking to bring glory to God and His Son, but rather are seeking to bring glory to their own names and exalt their own ministries and gifts. Satan's ministers pretending to be God's servants of righteousness teach their followers that God is devoted to giving the church the kingdoms of this world with all their glory and power. Because of this false teaching, many have become shipwreck in their faith and are being sidetracked into pursuing money, material things and positions of honor in this world.

Even some of the Lord's true children are swept away in this error, resulting in untold spiritual damage and confusion. May the Lord preserve us from this trap and purify our hearts so that they are seeking only the glory and interests of our Lord Jesus. JESUS' KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD (JOHN 18:36) Jesus clearly tells us by this scripture that His kingdom is not an earthly one, but a heavenly one. Christ's kingdom does not have any origin from earth; it is entirely of heaven, and has heaven's fragrance and beauty.

As followers of Jesus we are citizens of His kingdom and servants of His will. We are called to set our hearts' affections on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, and to seek those things which are above. We are not to seek an earthly kingdom nor are we to place our treasures on earth. All who are in love with our heavenly King are not to receive from the world anything that would be a substitute for the things we have been given as citizens of Christ's heavenly kingdom.

As loyal subjects, we are to be wholly after the heavenliness of Christ's ways, character and love. God calls those who are in love with Jesus and looking for His second appearing pilgrims and sojourners--those who are not at home on earth. They do not find lasting joy and peace from the things on earth. They are not seeking an earthly inheritance nor are they seeking an earthly city. Instead, they are from another country, a heavenly one, and they are only visiting here. Their lives and lifestyles should show forth that they are true pilgrims.

He does not want us to be of the world nor does he want us to try to make our lives, worship and church gatherings to be like the kingdoms of this world. The world focuses on outward appearances and making everything look good to the natural, carnal eye. But God does not care how things look outwardly; He is looking at the heart, to see if there is genuine love for Him and true humility and meekness of spirit. The kingdoms of this world are held together by power structures of authority.

But in God's kingdom we are held together by His love and grace and those in His kingdom are not seeking to rule over others, but to be their servants, unlike the rulers of this world who lord it over their subjects. Remember, Jesus said that we are in the world but not of the world. We must not derive our nature, ways or practices from the world, nor find our treasures and deepest joys from this age. FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CANNOT LOVE THE WORLD OR THE THINGS IN THE WORLD (COL. 3:1, 2; 1 PET. 2:11; 1 JOHN 2:15-17; EPH. 2:1, 2) God calls His church to be holy and set aside for His glory.

We are called to seek after the things of God and of Christ and not to set our hearts' desires on the things of earth. Peter tells us, as aliens and strangers and exiles in this world to abstain from the sensual urges, evil passions, and desires of the flesh that are waging war against our soul. Because of this command from the Lord, we are told that we cannot love the world or the things in this world, since they all have their origin from the evil one. Here is exactly what the Lord tells us, "Do not love or cherish the world or the things that are in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love for the Father is not in them. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh [craving for sensual gratification] and the lust of the eyes [greedy longings of the mind] and the pride of life [assurance in one's own resources or in the stability of earthly things]--these do not come from the Father but are from the world [itself]. And the world passes away and disappears, and with it the forbidden cravings." As the people of God we are called to be partakers of His grace and mercy.

When we are filled with God's grace we are taught many things, if we maintain a meek and humble spirit. One of the many lessons that God's grace will teach those filled with His Spirit is the important lesson of resisting the ungodly ways of this world we live in. God says that His grace has appeared to all men instructing and training them to reject and renounce all ungodliness and worldly passions. We are called to live upright, discreet lives, devoted to the interests of Christ, while living in this present evil age.

Our hopes and expectations should be heavenward, looking with great anticipation for the second coming of our blessed Lord, who gave himself for us so that he may redeem us from all lawlessness and present us to himself without spot or wrinkle. Paul says that at one time when we lived in darkness and were under the power of the god of this world we lived for and loved the things of this world. We used to follow the course and fashion of this world and were under the sway and influence of its many desires and passions.

Our ego was stroked by this world and we loved it! We were under the power and control of the spirit of this age, living in the lusts of our flesh and embracing those things that God plainly condemns. Being slaves to our corrupt, sensual nature, we were driven by its many desires and were obeying its dictates

and impulses that were working in our minds and hearts, resulting in living lives that were in opposition to God's will. But God, who is rich in mercy and grace, has saved us by His grace and now we are to live by His Word and Spirit, loving only those things that are pure and wholesome and that bring glory to His name and benefit His kingdom interests.

The good news is that the follower of Jesus has been given His divine power, as well as Christ's divine nature, so that he may escape the moral decay that is in the world because of greed, covetousness and its evil ways. FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CANNOT BE FRIENDS OF THE WORLD (JAMES 4:4) To be a friend with someone means to share mutual interests and have hearts loyal towards each other. What an honor God has bestowed upon Abraham by calling him his friend. Jesus calls His followers friends if they obey His Word and do whatever He says.

Friendship is a wonderful gift God has given to us and when properly understood can be a source of great joy and a valuable treasure. However, it is a tragic thing when a person claims to be a follower of Jesus and at the same time is a friend of the world. God says that anyone who is choosing to be a friend of the world takes his stand as an enemy of God. This scripture is very clear, beloved. Anyone who is God's friend, sharing in His interests and loyal to His heart, will be an enemy of the world.

Likewise, if we are friends with this world, sharing in its interests and seeking to be loyal to its evil and perverted ways and customs, we become God's enemies. Friendship with God begins when our hearts become wholly devoted to seeking the glory of God alone and we are willing to follow Him even when it costs us everything. When we are friends with God we no longer view our walk with Him as to how it may benefit us personally or how we may gain by serving Him. Instead, we possess a heart like Paul who said that whatever things he may have had that were gain to him personally, he learned to count as rubbish for Christ's sake.

He went on to say that he counted everything as loss in comparison to possessing the priceless privilege of knowing Christ Jesus and becoming like Him. Paul, for the sake of Christ, was truly God's friend, and lost everything in this world in order to gain Christ in His fullness and be able to serve Him with an undistracted heart. To be God's friend also means that we become one with Him in His passion that the body of Christ might be filled with the fullness of His Son. When this happens, we seek to conform our lives to the will of God so that we can best serve this goal, so that all we do is helping others to enter more fully into God's intention for them.

We no longer live lives that are self-centered, revolving around our own interests and worldly comforts and pursuits, but are freed to live for others and serve God's interests in the lives of His people. Tragically, when those who claim to be Christians seek to be the world's friends, untold damage occurs. Friendship with the world begins when our hearts embrace the interests of this age and we become devoted to seeking after those things in it. This leads to strong passions within our hearts that war against God's will.

When these strong passions live in us, they become the source of strife, feuding and discord. This happens because we become committed to trying to obtain the desires that live in our hearts. However in this state our motives are not pure and we desire things so that we may spend them on our sensual pleasures, so that our ego can be satisfied. In this condition we are like unfaithful wives, like God's Word says, having illicit love affairs with the world and its many evil passions, breaking our marriage vow to God.

This is the condition that places a person as a friend of this world but an enemy to God! Let's heed God's Word and not be conformed to this world, but be renewed in our minds by thinking about the world in the way we ought to. FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WILL BE HATED BY THE WORLD (JOHN 15:18, 19) Jesus, when he walked upon this earth, was not loved, but hated, and eventually crucified. Because he was a bright light in the midst of thick moral darkness, He exposed the sin and wickedness of those who practice evil.

Christ did not come to condemn the world but that the world might find salvation by believing in Him. Sadly, because of their evil deeds, many chose to reject the light and to resist God's call to turn from their sin. Because of this, men hate Christ. Jesus taught that, because they are ever growing to be more and more like Him, His true followers would be treated in the same way that He was. Just as Jesus is not of the world, taking from the world his nature or ways, even so, the church is not of the world and does not derive her nature from the world.

If Jesus or the church were of the world, then the world would love them and treat them with affection and honor, as they do with their own. But since neither Jesus nor His followers are of the world the world hates them. Jesus warned us that an hour would be coming when those who hunt down and kill his followers would think they are doing God a service. When the Church is really filled with the Spirit of Christ they will live as He lived and be loved by those who love Him and hated by an evil, Christ rejecting world, as He is.

Tragically, many who claim to be followers of Jesus are not hated, but loved, honored and praised by the world. Jesus said this should not be. He warned us that if men speak nicely of us too often, then it is a sign that we may be, at worst false followers, and at best, backslidden genuine believers in danger of being judged by our Lord. He said that false prophets are spoken highly of by the world but His true prophets are not. Likewise, those who are in love with this world and friends with it will be loved and honored by it, but those who are in love with the Lord and are His friends will be hated by the world.

The true followers may be hated by this world, but they will be loved and cared for by their Lord, who loves those who love Him and cares for those who are hated for His name's sake. Another reason why God's Church is hated by the world is because true believers do not trust in the world's wisdom (1 Cor. 1:18-31). The message of the cross is utter folly to the worldly wise man who loves to glory in man and not in the Lamb of God. Whenever a follower of Jesus renounces the world's wisdom and chooses to embrace the wisdom of God, which is Christ crucified, he is hated by those who love the world's wisdom.

Those who seek to know God by human wisdom cannot know him and are blinded by pride and sin. The world's wisdom places man at the center of the universe and makes much of him--boasting of the great potential he has in becoming a god-- supposing that man can control his own destiny by his words and supreme intelligence. But such "wisdom" is foolishness to God and will never be able to understand God's salvation plan. Those who embrace such worldly wisdom will be rejected by God--unable to partake in the gift of His Son.

Those who love God's ways have received the Spirit of God and have rejected the spirit from the world. Therefore, they are able to receive the things from God and are able to see what God is doing and what is pleasing to Him. FOLLOWERS OF JESUS MUST USE BUT NOT ABUSE THIS WORLD'S GOODS (1 CORINTHIANS 7:30, 31) When Paul was writing this scripture to those believers living in Corinth, he had one objective. Satan was deceiving this group of Christians and turning their hearts from devotion to the Lord Jesus.

Some of Satan's wiles were divisions among them, carnal living, trusting in worldly wisdom, sexual immorality, and following after the fleshly pursuits and practices of their day, in particular, ungrounded divorce. Paul's response to these things was a call for them to repent so that they could once again possess an undivided heart towards their Lord. This can be summed up in Paul's statement to them when he said, "My desire for you is to have you free from all anxiety and distressing care" (1 Cor. 7: 32a).

This captures the Lord's heart for all of His children. Because of this, the Lord tells us very clearly that we who have to deal with the world's goods must do so in a very guarded way to prevent any form of greed. When a man accepts the call of the Spirit of God to become a follower of Jesus Christ, he is called to live a life free from any form of love for material things or grasping for things of this earth. God's Word clearly tells us that when a person is filled with God's Spirit and living in union with the risen Lord, he is to be content with the things that he has and that his entire life ought to be free from any hint of covetousness.

God commands us to possess a character and moral disposition that is free from the love of money which includes any form of lust for earthly possessions. All who are claiming allegiance to Jesus Christ are called to live a life that is characterized by the heavenly quality of contentment. We are told in God's Word that those who are buying and selling this world's goods are to act as though they possess nothing. By this God is teaching us that our heart condition toward anything we may possess is to be free from the things we own so that they do not own us!

We must be guarded, while using this world's goods not to overuse the enjoyments of this life so that we do not become absorbed by them. If God should allow us to possess more than what is necessary for our own needs, it is so that we may have extra to share with those who are lacking. We are never called to indulge in our excess because this is what the world does. In the early days of the church when they were deeply devoted to the Lord Jesus and filled with His presence, they lived beautiful lives free from grasping earthly things.

Everyone saw to it that his brothers' and sisters' needs were being met so that no one lacked what was needful. This is the way things will be if men and women truly walk in union with the Spirit of God. It is imperative that we follow our Lord's command to, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you." The things he was referring to were necessities such as shelter, clothing and food. He warned us that the nations of the world, who do not know God place great value on such things and seek after them with singleness of heart.

But as His followers, we are not to follow their example. Instead, we are to make knowing God our primary pursuit in life and trust God to provide all our needs as we work an honest living for the glory of God. FOLLOWERS OF JESUS ARE CALLED TO OVERCOME THE WORLD AND BE LIGHTS, REVEALING THE LOVE OF GOD (1 JOHN 5:4, 5; JOHN 3:16; MAT. 5: 14-16) Days before our Lord was crucified, he warned His followers of the many dangers they would encounter after his resurrection, as they sought to obey Him.

Some of the dangers he warned of included the harsh way they would be treated by religious leaders. Some would be thrown into prisons and beaten. Others would be put to death for His name's sake. Jesus warned his followers that living in this world they would suffer severe trials, tribulations and times of testing. He encouraged them that they were not to fear any of these things, because he had overcome the world. In spite of all the hurtful and cruel things that the world afflicted upon the Lord, he was never defiled by them.

Whenever the world's fiery temptations and fierce storms come to us, we are able to overcome by the faith working in our hearts, as we trust in our risen Lord to be our source of strength. Satan wants to overcome the follower of Jesus by the many snares he places before us, but Jesus calls us to overcome, rather than to be overcome. Those who were being attacked by the world and the beast in the book of Revelation were able to overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony.

So too, by trusting in the precious blood of Jesus and relying on the Word of God, we can be victorious over the worldly powers that seek to seduce us. God says that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. Though we all will face times of great testing living in this corrupt world that is under the power of the wicked one, we can be sure that the power of Jesus Christ is always greater than the power of the devil. This power that comes from God to all who love Him and obey His Word is able to deliver us from every evil work and to preserve us blameless before the Lord at His appearing.

Because we are called to overcome as our Lord has, we are also called to be bright, shining lights in the world. We know that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that all who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life. God has given us the wonderful gift of his love being shed abroad in our hearts so that we too can love those he loves and be able to show them the mercy and grace of God, as it is revealed in our lives. What a wonderful and marvelous calling we have received to be shining examples of Christ's love and grace.

God is calling us to overcome the world and not to be overcome by it. This happens when we are able to endure all things without grumbling, faultfinding or complaining. Rather, by the power of God's Spirit working in us we are enabled to be blameless and without guile, innocent and uncontaminated followers of Jesus Christ. When our hearts are filled with gratefulness and praise we are able to overcome the world and be seen as bright lights or beacons shining out clearly in the darkness.

Then we are truly, as Jesus said, a city set on a hill visible for all to see! **SUMMING UP THE VIEW OF THE CHRISTIAN AND THE WORLD** We have learned by this study in God's Word that the whole world is under the power of the wicked one. Jesus, when faced with the temptations from Satan, resisted the offer of the world and all its glory and honor. God's kingdom is heavenly and not earthly and therefore all who follow the Lord Jesus are to resist placing their hearts' affections on anything in the world.

We are called to be friends of God and not friends of the world and because of this the world will hate us just as it hates our Lord. Because we live in the world we must use the world's goods but guard against abusing them by grasping for things. Finally, we are called to overcome the world and all its many trials and traps, knowing that as we do so, we become as bright shining lights able to reveal the love and mercy of God in the midst of the world's darkness and perversity.

As this happens, we become like a city set on a hill for all to see the wonderful love of God as it flows from our lives. This great love was best demonstrated by God sending his only Son to die for our sins and can be seen in our lives as we lay them down to serve His interests. In closing, perhaps as you were reading this message you have realized (as I did) that you have at times failed to live as one called to be in this world, but not of it. How often I discover that I do not live up to the call of God's Word.

Yet, may we all be reminded that there is always hope for those who come to God in meekness and admit their weakness and sin. May we run to Him today, fully confessing our shortcomings, yet encouraged by God's promise in His Word: "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit

of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15).

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