

My Laws in Their Hearts

by Watchman Nee

Watchman Nee's sermon explores the challenges Christians face in a world influenced by Satan, emphasizing the importance of spiritual discernment and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: John 1:13, John 16:8-13, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 5:9-10, 1 Corinthians 7:29-32, Ephesians 5:25, James 4:4, 1 John 2:15-17, 1 John 4:4, 1 John 5:18

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Living in the World"

Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes the spiritual battle Christians face in a world dominated by Satan, who seeks to capture human allegiance. He explains that while believers must engage with the world, they must do so with caution, recognizing the dangers of becoming entangled in its temptations. Nee encourages Christians to rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance, as true safety lies in abiding in Christ rather than adhering to rigid rules. He highlights the paradox of living in the world without being of it, urging believers to maintain their spiritual integrity amidst worldly pressures. Ultimately, he reassures that those who are of God have overcome the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

In earlier chapters we have been building up a picture of this world, not just as a location, nor as a race of people, nor indeed as anything ^merely material, but rather as a spiritual system at the head of which is God's enemy. "The world" is Satan's masterpiece, and we have thought of him as directing all his strength and ingenuity into causing it to flourish. To what end? Surely to capture men's allegiance and draw them to himself. He has one object: to establish his own dominion in human hearts worldwide. Even though he must be aware that that dominion may last only briefly, that, without question, is his goal. And as the end of the age approaches and his efforts increase, so does the distress of God's people intensify. For as aliens and sojourners, their position-in the world and yet not of it-is an uncomfortable one. They would fain seek relief from the spiritual tension in physical distance. How good it would be to escape from this world completely and be forever with the Lord!

But clearly that is not his will. As we saw, he prayed the Father not to take his own out of the world but to preserve them there from the evil one. And Paul takes a similar line. Having in a particular instance exhorted the Corinthian believers not to have fellowship with a certain class of sinner, he immediately takes steps to guard against possible misunderstanding. They are not to isolate themselves. They are not to sever connections with all sinners in the world, nor even with those in the category described, for to do

so would involve their leaving the world altogether. "I wrote unto you in my epistle to have no company with fornicators; not altogether (i.e. not at all meaning) with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous and extortioners, or with idolators; for then must ye needs go out of the world" (1 Cor. 5:9, 10).

It is clear from Paul's words therefore that we may, and indeed must, associate with the world to a certain extent, for is it not the world that God so loved? But here is the question: To what extent? How far may we go? All of us agree that we are obliged at some points to touch the things of the world. But presumably there is a limit somewhere. Keep within that limit and we are safe; exceed it and we risk becoming implicated by Satan.

I do not think we can exaggerate this problem, for it is an acute one and the dangers are real. If the time should come when you are acutely ill and in great pain, and the doctor should prescribe for you heroin or morphine, you would instantly be alive to the danger of developing a craving for the drug. You would obey him and take the treatment, but you would take it fearfully and prayerfully, for you know there is a power in it, and you know you are liable to come under that power. This would be especially so if the treatment had to be prolonged.

Every time you and I touch the world through the things of the world-and we must do so repeatedly-we should feel much as we would feel about taking morphine, for there are demons at the back of everything that belongs to the world. Just as I may, if seriously ill, be prescribed opium as a treatment, so also, because I am still in the world, I have to do business with the world, follow some trade or employment, earn my livelihood. But how much treatment with dangerous drugs I can safely take without falling a prey to the opium craving I do not know; and how many things I can buy, or how much money I can make, or how close can be my business or professional associations, without my becoming hooked, I likewise do not know. All I know is that there is a Satanic power behind every worldly thing. How vital therefore for every Christian to have a clear revelation of the spirit of the world in order to appreciate how real is the danger to which he is continually exposed!

Perhaps you think I am going too far. Perhaps you say: Oh yes, that may be a good sermon illustration, but I find it hard not to feel you are overstating the case. But when you see, then you will say of the world, as you say of opium, that there is a sinister power behind it, a power designed to seduce and to captivate men. Those whose eyes have been really opened to this world's true character find they must touch everything in it with fear and trembling, looking continually to the Lord. They know that at any moment they are liable to be caught in Satan's entanglements. Just as the drug which, in the first instance, is welcomed to relieve sickness may ultimately become itself a cause of sickness, so equally the things of the world which we can legitimately use under the Lord's authority may, if we are heedless, become a cause of our downfall. Only fools can be careless in circumstances like these.

No wonder we look with envy upon John the Baptist! How easy, we feel, if like him we could simply withdraw into a safe place apart! But we are not like him. Our Lord has sent us into the world in his own footsteps, "both eating and drinking." Since God so loved, his command to us is to go "into all the world" and proclaim his good news; and surely that "all" includes the folk with whom we must rub shoulders daily!

So a serious problem faces us here. As we have said, presumably there must be a limit. Presumably God has drawn somewhere a line of demarcation. Stay within the bounds of that line and we will be safe; cross it and grave danger threatens. But where does it lie? We have to eat and drink, to marry and bring up children, to trade and to toil. How do we do so and yet remain uncontaminated? How do we mingle freely

with the men and women whom God so loved as to give his Son for them, and still keep ourselves unspotted from the world?

If our Lord had limited our buying and selling to so much a month, how simple that would be! The rules would be plain for any to follow. All who spent more than a certain amount per month would be worldly Christians, and all who spent less than that amount would be unworldly.

But since our Lord has stipulated no figure, we are cast on him unceasingly. For what? I think the answer is very wonderful. Not to be tied by the rules, but that we may remain all the time within bounds of another kind: the bounds of his life. If our Lord had given us a set of rules and regulations to observe, then we could take great care to abide by these. In fact however our task is something far more simple and straightforward, namely, to abide in the Lord himself. Then we could keep the law. Now we need only keep in fellowship with him. And the joy of it is that, provided we live in close touch with God, his Holy Spirit within our hearts will always tell us when we reach the limit!

We spoke earlier of the kingdom of antichrist, soon to be revealed. John, in his epistle, writing to his "little children" about the world and the things of the world (1 John 2:15) goes on to warn them: "As ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists" (verse 18). Faced with these, and with that even more insidious "spirit of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already" (4:3), what are they to do? How are they in their simplicity to know what is true and what is false? How are they possibly to tell which ground is treacherous to walk upon and which is safe?

The answer John gives them is so simple that today we are afraid to believe it. "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things.... The anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that anyone teach you: but as his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him" (2:20, 27). This is certainly an allusion to the Spirit of truth, who, Jesus promised his disciples, would both convict the world and guide them into all the truth (John 16:8-13).

In any given instance there must be safe limits known to God beyond which we should not go. They are not marked out on the ground for us to see, but one thing is certain: He who is the Comforter will surely know them, even if perhaps Satan knows them too. Can we not trust him? If at some point we are about to overstep them, can we not depend on him at once to make us inwardly aware of the fact?

In 1 Corinthians 7 the apostle Paul offers us some further guidance on the same theme. "This I say, brethren, the time is shortened, that henceforth both those that have wives may be as though they had none; and those that weep, as though they wept not; and those that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and those that buy, as though they possessed not; and those that use the world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away. I would have you to be free from cares" (verses 29-32). Here several matters are in turn touched upon, but the governing factor in them all is clearly this, that "the time is shortened," or, as some translators render it, "straitened." We are living, the apostle says, in days of peculiar pressure, and the principle that must guide us for such days is this, "that they who have ... be as not having."

Does Paul, we wonder, contradict himself? In Ephesians 5 he enjoins husbands to love their wives with as perfect a love as that with which Christ loved the Church-no less. Yet here he tells them to live as though not having wives at all! Does he honestly, we exclaim in dismay, expect us at one and the same time to reconcile such complete opposites?

Here at once it must be said that such a paradoxical life is a life that none but Christians can live. Perhaps the expression "as not having" affords us a clue. It reveals that the matter is an inner matter, a question of the heart's loyalty. In Christ there is an inner liberation to God, not merely an outward change of conduct. They have, and having, they rejoice in Ephesians 5; but they are not bound by what they possess, so that having not, they equally rejoice in 1 Corinthians 7. Notwithstanding all they "have," they are so truly delivered in spirit from the world's possessiveness that they can live "as not having."

The natural man lives at one extreme or the other—either having, and being wholly taken up with what he has, or if he is religious, putting away what he has so that he no longer has it, and so being no longer concerned with it at all. But the Christian way is utterly different from the natural way. The Christian way to solve the problem is not by removing the thing, but by delivering the heart from the grip of that thing. The wife is not removed, nor the affection for the wife, but both wife and husband are freed from the overweening dominance of that affection. So, too, the trouble that caused weeping is not removed, but the life is no longer controlled by that trouble. The cause of joy still remains, but there is an inner check against vain abandon to the thing that caused it. Buying and selling go on as before, but an inward deliverance has loosened the personal grip upon them. We have them all, but we have them "as not having."

We talk sometimes about our desire to maintain, like John, the testimony of Jesus in the earth. Let us remember that that testimony is based, not on what we can say about this or that, but on what Satan can say about us. God has put us in the world, and often he locates us in some specially difficult places, where we are tempted to feel that worldlings have a much easier time than do Christians. That is because Christians are indeed aliens, living here in an element that is not naturally theirs. A swimmer may dive deep into the sea, but without special clothing and an airline to the atmosphere that is his own, he cannot stay there. The pressure is too great and he must breathe the air of the world to which he belongs. He stays deep as long as there is a task to do and as long as he is supplied with the power to overcome the element around him, but he does not belong to the element and it has no part in him.

Thus it is that the problem of our touch with the world is not solved by any change of outward action. Some think that, at a time like this in which we are living, it is a sign of spirituality to make no provision for the coming days. That is not spirituality, it is folly. What we may do with the provision we make is a question we shall consider in our final chapter, but God's word makes it plain that we are to use the world. We are to eat and drink, to trade merchandise and grow crops, to rejoice, yes and if need be to weep, and yet not to use any of these things to the full. We have learned what is at stake in all our relationships with the world. It is no wonder therefore that we have learned also to tread softly, heedful all the while of the Comforter's gentle constraining.

Jesus came "from above." He could claim without fear of challenge: "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." The line of demarcation was drawn, not on the ground at his feet but in his own heart. But just as truly, everything in this world that is "from above" is as safe as he is. God is at the head of the airline working the pumps, as it were. A life that belongs above is being sustained and provided for down here by him. Thus it comes about that if a thing is spiritual and "of God," we need not worry about it nor contend for its preservation. "My kingdom is not of this world, else would my servants fight." They have no need to.

God does not worry about us, simply because he has no anxiety about his Holy Spirit. There is a sense in which poor quality spiritual life is impossible, because spiritual life is God's life; and just as truly, spiritual

life can only be overwhelmed if God himself can be overwhelmed. God does not argue about this fact. He is content to leave it to the Comforter to make it real in us. "Ye are of God, my little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Again, the same verse which tells us that the whole world lies in the lap of the evil one-yes, the very same verse!-assures us once more that "we are of God" (1 John 5:19). We are of God! Could we possibly discover a more blessed fact to balance against that other ugly fact and to outweigh it? We who believe on Jesus' name "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). And praise him, because we are begotten of God, the evil one cannot touch us (1 John 5:18).

Put very simply, Satan's power in the world is everywhere. Yet wherever men and women walk in the Spirit, sensitive to the anointing they have from God, that power of his just evaporates. There is a line drawn by God, a boundary where by virtue of his own very presence Satan's writ does not run. Let God but occupy all the space himself, and what room is left for the evil one?

Are we thus utterly for God? Can Satan testify of you and me: "I cannot entrap that man!"?

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