

Worldliness in the Church Today

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There is a great contrast between the powers of darkness and the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The polarity of evil is strong and constant. The power of truth makes men free and purifies the soul (John 8:32; 1 Peter 1:22). It takes continual vigilance and great effort to stay in the right way and oppose the evil appeals that lead downward to hell. It takes self denial and strong resistance to the appeal of Satan to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

It is not possible to be of Christ and of the world at the same time. This is the impossible position many are trying to occupy today, but the end is always the same; they are swept up in the current of worldly interest and lost. If one is the friend of the world he is the enemy of God. We are not to love the world, neither the things that are in the world. We must keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

Worldliness is not clearly defined in the minds of many. Some think of it as some definite word or deed, and forget the state of the heart in the matter. Actually, worldliness is that state of mind that is expressed in various activities of life. That deed or word is simply the expression of worldliness already present in the heart. "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5). Because of the gross misunderstanding of what worldliness really involves, many people are about as worldly as they can get while being accepted by society in general as being good, religious people. For this reason we need to learn what causes worldliness among Christians, how it develops and how it may be detected. It is in order to give some space to the causes and development of worldly minded people in the church before we consider how worldliness is expressed in life.

What do we mean by worldliness? A man is actually what he **thinks**. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). Jesus said, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies: these are the things which defile the man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man"(Matt. 15:17-20). "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

What we are is the result of what we see, hear, feel and do. Each person endowed with the mental ability to be responsible for his own conduct must decide between good and evil in all his deeds, his judgments and his speech. His decision must necessarily come from whatever force governs his thinking. If he is led by the lusts of the flesh, his conduct will be worldly; if he is led by the Spirit of God, his conduct will be in harmony with the will of Christ. This defines the difference between a moral and immoral person. We understand that one may be a moral person in some respects and not be a Christian. In respect to his moral conduct he is doing what the Spirit directs whether he knows it or not. In short, when one's thinking and conduct is in harmony with the will of God, he is right; he is moral. Otherwise, he is immoral.

Of course, we understand that Satan is the original cause of all unrighteousness. He uses wiles (Eph. 6:11) and a snare (2 Tim. 2:26) to accomplish his defilement of humanity. Satan does not

appear with his snare (a trap, allurement to do evil) and wiles (craft, deceit, a cunning device) as is generally pictured to us with horns, an evil face and a fork in his hand. This would appeal to no one of reason. Instead, he appears as a "good" agent of peace, wealth, pleasure and happiness. The scriptures speak thus of Satan's appearance: "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Cor. 11:14-15). We can expect Satan to appeal through the most desirable lusts of mankind. Whatever be our weaknesses, there we may expect him to labor to entrap us. We should teach our children that Satan approaches through those things that appear easy and desirable, but which are based upon the lusts of the flesh and not the true standard of right and wrong.

Everyone who is not in Christ is of the world. We could not properly speak of an alien sinner as becoming worldly because he is already in the world and of the world. No matter how good he may be morally, he is in the powers of darkness - he is of the world - until he is delivered from this state by obedience to the gospel of Christ. Therefore, when we speak of worldliness developing among people, we necessarily confine the subject to those who have been delivered from this present evil world and are turning back again to this state from which they were delivered. Worldliness develops among those who are not worldly; it could not develop among those who are already worldly. One who has pneumonia does not "develop" pneumonia. We recognize that worldly minded persons can grow worse, and in this sense worldliness can develop to more serious consequences among people of this earth.

What causes worldliness to develop among the people of God? The heart must be right for the seed of the lust of the flesh. We certainly cannot lay the blame to God or His word. We can not charge those who walk after the Spirit and keep themselves unspotted from the world. We must look to conditions among the people of God that are promoted by Satan. The heart of man is the soil in which the seed of the word of God is planted and grows to righteousness. This is also the soil in which the evil seed of Satan is planted and grows to unrighteousness. Man's words and deeds are the results of his thinking. The heart is the seat of all responsible conduct. The heart is good or evil, depending upon that which is believed and desired. If the heart is under the control of Satan through the lusts of the flesh, the conduct will be directed by the god of this world - Satan. But if the heart is under the control of Christ through his word by the Spirit, the conduct will be directed by the King - Christ. Now what causes the development of worldliness among the saints?

Why does worldliness exist? There are at least four reasons: 1) The love of money, 2) Lustful pleasure, 3) The pride of life, and 4) Lack of faith.

How does worldliness develop? At least five things combine to provide favorable conditions wherein worldliness may develop within the church. **Professional preaching** is a major cause of worldly attitudes among the people of God. When one begins to preach for wealth, praise and power, he will preach what the people want to hear. Many want to hear what will not condemn what they are doing or want to do and will not burden them with too many obligations. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Those who do not want sound doctrine will "heap to

themselves" those teachers who will preach what the people want to hear, and enough money will do the trick. Those who preach the word deserve to be supported; God ordained it (1 Cor. 9:14). But to preach anything other than the gospel of Christ for money can produce nothing but worldly minded disciples who are not of the Lord, but of Satan. Failing to preach the word of God completely and without compromise leads to worldliness.

Another cause of worldliness in addition to commercial preaching is **unqualified elders**. Those men who are not qualified to lead and tend the flock of God, or those who are unwilling to do so, lead to minding the things of the world rather than the things of God. Instead of overseeing the flock which is among them and leading in the way of truth, unqualified bishops develop loose and liberal attitudes toward sin and worldly affairs that produce worldliness among many in the church.

The direct outgrowth of commercial preaching and unqualified bishops is another cause of worldliness: **unconverted "church members."** There are hundreds who are numbered with the saints who have never been persuaded that Christ is the Saviour, that the gospel is the only power to lead men to salvation, and that they are sinners. These have been ducked in water without any real conviction and repentance. These people still mind the things of the world and they influence others in the church to become worldly minded. Some are so carnal that they can not think in terms of spiritual things. That is a good field for the devil.

A fourth cause of worldliness is the **lack of discipline** in many congregations. When we have the combination of preachers who are more interested in the praise of men than the praise of God, unqualified and ungodly overseers, and unconverted "church members" we should expect no discipline at all upon those who walk in unrighteousness. We must teach people the word of the Lord and if they will not walk in truth, deal with them as the word of God instructs (2 Thess. 3:6; 2 John 9:10; Rom. 16:17).

There is a definite pattern in the development of worldliness among Christians. The **attitude toward authority** begins the downward path toward apostasy. Since worldliness is that state of mind that is governed by the god of this world - Satan (2 Cor. 4:4), and since the authority of Christ is the power that separates us from this world, any disregard or disrespect for this authority will lead away from Christ and toward the world. Jesus charged the scribes and Pharisees with transgressing the command of God by their traditions (Matt. 15:3). These traditions were called the commandments of man (Matt. 15:9).

The loss of respect for the authority of Christ grows out of the loss of the love for the truth. Jesus said: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:12). The urge to conform to the world grows as love for Christ wanes. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Once this urge to conform to this world becomes strong enough that we try to divide allegiance between Christ and the world, we have developed worldliness in heart that will show itself in many deeds and words in life. This is what we mean by

worldliness, and this is why so many today are trying to compromise with the things of this world that lead away from God and destroy the power of preaching in the hearts of many. The final article in this series will deal with the manner in which worldliness is shown in life.

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