

In But Not Of

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Jesus prayed to the Father for all who believe in Him through the teachings given by His original disciples, “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” (Jn. 17:14-16) If any facet of the gospel should show us the true nature of what God has called us to in Christ Jesus, this question of what it means to be in but not of this world must stand head and shoulders above most, if not all, the other facets of the gospel of Christ. This is where “the rubber meets the road,” where the genuine life of Christ exposes all else as mere fraud and false religion, where our lives can and must be measured in practical (that is, visibly beneficial to *God's* kingdom) terms or else we must judge ourselves unfit and perhaps even fully disqualified in the faith. (2 Cor. 13:5)

We are, of course, most familiar with the world. The description of the unrighteous who do not and will not inherit the kingdom of God fits many of us perfectly – such were many of us! (1 Cor. 6:9-11) The list of the works of the flesh is very familiar to us – at least those parts God's Spirit has graciously taught us to repent of, a work of purification that is not as complete as most “Christians” suppose. (Gal. 5:19-21) Even John's spiritual warning that “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” (1 Jn. 2:16) makes some sense to us even when its depths remain beyond our current reach.

Our ability to humanly dissect and grasp the difference between in and of the world pretty much stops right there however. “God is Spirit” (Jn. 4:24) and “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2:14) This is why Paul wrote, “We speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age... Now we [who believe] have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” (1 Cor. 2:6, 12-13) The natural man *is* of the world and *cannot* know the things of God's Spirit. Only the new creation, which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24, Jn. 1:12-13), is freely given the things of God and those new creations whose spiritual eyes and ears are opened and developed are “the mature” who can discern and discuss what God has done and is doing as well as recognize and expose the schemes of the devil. (2 Cor. 2:11, etc.)

- The natural man *cannot* know what it means to be not of this world because he is inescapably both in and of this world. The spiritual man, if he will submit himself to the leading of the Spirit (Rom. 8:4), will manifest the righteousness and holiness of God, thereby demonstrating that his true identity is not found in this world.
- The natural man can read the pages of the New Testament and, from the various requirements and instructions which even he can see are commandments God expects to be obeyed, he can concoct all manner of “Christian” laws that are

no different from the laws the Pharisees constructed around Moses' laws. The hypocrisy that abounds at most, if not all, "churches" is merely the evidence that false religion – and not Christ – is the real head of those "churches." The spiritual man learns that the Word of God is the Spirit of God who is a wind blowing as He wishes (Jn. 3:8) and learns to follow the Head of the Body wherever He leads. This one's actions will not be in contradiction to the written words God gave as testimony to Himself but (the Bible, that is, in its rightly divided words of truth nested appropriately in the whole counsel of God) but rather will be in love, the fulfillment or manifestation of God's attributes.

- Not only can the natural man write "Christian" laws but he can easily discard things from the New Testament that are clearly and plainly written – clearly and plainly, that is, for those whose eyes and ears are not blinded and closed by human tradition, demonic doctrines, philosophy or "theology." This tendency to do only what is right and good in one's own eyes (see Jdgs. 21:25) is called lawlessness in the New Testament and the natural man does not hesitate to use the things "of Christ" he likes (prestige, power, preeminence, etc.) while just as quickly throwing out those things truly of Christ that are just too difficult or onerous for his own personal preferences and tastes (duty, responsibility, holiness, obedience, etc.) The spiritual man simply seeks the will of God and does it, relying on the strength Christ gives when the instructions or requirements seem unbearable or impossible, which, at times, can indeed seem to be that way.

- The natural man can slave his life away presupposing that he serves his family's best interests by providing copious amounts of this world's goods, services, luxuries, toys and gadgets for his wife and children, even while his absence and the vacuum that creates molds them into things the world and the demonic can manipulate, control and use for evil purposes. The spiritual man works not merely to meet his own needs (2 Ths. 3:12) but to also have something to give to others in need. (Eph. 4:28) But always the spiritual man knows that his wife and children have needs this world cannot supply.

- The natural man follows his own desires and thus becomes an enemy of the cross of Christ. (Phlp. 3:18-19, Gal. 5:17) The spiritual man chooses to live in the Spirit by setting his mind on things above (Col. 3:2) and thus overcomes the flesh (Gal. 5:16) and fulfills the objectives of Christ and God in this darkened and dying world. (Rom. 13:10)

There simply cannot be a list of rules by which one can determine whether one is in but not of this world. The laws of Moses have not been replaced by the rules of Christ and the apostles nor by the by-laws and creeds of the "church." There are no rules, no fruit of the tree of the (independent from God) knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 3:22) There is a Head, Christ Jesus, to follow. He alone is the tree of life.

This is not to say there are no Scriptures to use as tests that we may apply to ourselves to be certain that we are in the faith, but rather that the very ability to make a righteous judgment of ourselves is not based on our own ability to see and analyze what we have seen (Jn. 7:24) but

instead must rest upon divinely given discernment, revelation and understanding. Nor could it be otherwise. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14) We are not sons of God because we have decided to proclaim ourselves as sons of God. We are sons of God when we follow the Spirit of God. And whether our following is genuine or false is seen in the fruit that comes forth in our lives. (Mt. 7:20, Gal. 5:22-23)

Thus we need to know what this world is like (as God sees it) and examine ourselves (with the aid of the Holy Spirit of truth and righteousness) and purge ourselves of all filthiness of flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1) as quickly as He reveals it to us. We need to know what God has done for us and given to us and who and what He is (as best we can know such wondrous things). Then we need to know (by spiritual insight and revelation) what God requires of us, what He expects our lives to be like. This *is* the balance of being in the world but not of it. Anything else is merely a counterfeit designed to lure and pull us back into the filthiness and death of this world – and calling such a deception a “doctrine” or “theology” does not thereby transform it into a truth. Its attractiveness to our religious flesh only makes it a more lethal form of deception.

Let he who has ears hear.

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