

# Worldliness, Scripturally Defined

**Drew Conley, Ph.D.**

Senior Pastor, Hampton Park Baptist Church

## INTRODUCTION

Need for this study:

- Some professing believers live as if worldliness were no problem.
- Some professing believers define worldliness however they like, binding consciences and slandering other believers who don't conform to their manmade definitions.
- The Scriptures give full treatment of this theme, tying it to the gospel itself.

If we're committed to genuine Christianity, then the Bible gets to define the terms, explain the ramifications, and give the cure. Refusal to submit to the Scriptures on this matter—either by disregard or displacement—is fundamentally *worldly*.

## I. WORLDLINESS DEFINED

1 John 2:15-17: Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

Ephesians 2:1-3: And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

James 4:1-4: What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (See also James 4:13-17; 5:1-6)

John 15:18-25: If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. 20Remember the word that I said to you, "A slave is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. 21But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. 22If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23He who

hates Me hates My Father also. <sup>24</sup>If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sinned; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. <sup>25</sup>But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, "They hated me without a cause."

Matthew 13:22 And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

### Observations from Scriptural Data

- Worldliness is deeper, more serious, and more pervasive than we tend to think.
- Worldliness is the enemy of godliness and holiness.
- Worldliness is driven by selfish desire and empowered by Satan.
- Worldliness is contrary to the Holy Spirit and His transforming work.
- Worldliness is idolatrous, seeking to dethrone God from the human heart.
- Worldliness is hostile to Christ and those faithful to Him.
- Worldliness chokes out the fruitfulness of God's Word in a person's life.

## **II. WORLDLINESS EXPRESSED**

James 3:13-18: Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. <sup>15</sup>This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. <sup>16</sup>For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

Galatians 5:13-21

<sup>13</sup>For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup>For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup>But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. <sup>16</sup>But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. <sup>19</sup>Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup>envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Colossians 2:8-10, 16-23: See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. <sup>9</sup>For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, <sup>10</sup>and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; <sup>16</sup>Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon

or a Sabbath day--17things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. 20If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22(which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

James 4:13-17: Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 14Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." 16But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. (See also James 5:1-6)

1 Peter 4:2-4: So as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. 4In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you.

#### Observations from Scriptural Data

- Worldliness expresses itself through attitudes and actions of the flesh such as jealousy, envy, strife, selfish ambition, malice, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, quarrels, fights, fits of anger, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, drunkenness, orgies, greed (covetousness).
- Worldliness expresses itself in manmade religion, codes, and disciplines that ignore one's relationship to Christ.
- Worldliness manifests itself in boastful planning that leaves God's will and providence out.
- Worldliness expresses itself in the lives of those who act as if this life is all there is.

### **III. WORLDLINESS ESCAPED**

Titus 2:11-14: For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Romans 12:1-2: Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

2And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

1 Peter 2:9-11

9But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

2 Peter 3:11-13 (in contrast those whose portion is only in this world): Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 13But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

John 17:14-19: I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

See also 1 Peter 2:13-17, Matthew 22:15-22, and Romans 13:1-10 for a Christian's obligation to the authorities/customs/people of this world.

#### Observations from Scriptural Data

- Only the gracious power of God in Christ can deliver us from worldliness.
- The spiritual transformation of a renewed mind guards us from conforming to this world and leads us to fulfill God's will in a worship-filled lifestyle.
- Our new nature and life in Christ trains us to say no to ungodliness and worldliness and to abstain from fleshly desires that make war on our souls.
- Keeping in mind that this world and everything in it will be burned up helps us live for what lasts forever instead of for the world that is passing away.
- Jesus Christ has prayed to the Father to preserve us from the evil in the world as we carry out our mission to the world as those who are not of the world but sent to be in it.
- The Word of God is the key to sanctifying our thinking and our living in the midst of the world.

**CONCLUSION**

Diagnostic questions to discern what is worldly:

- Does this activity, thing, pursuit take my heart away from God?
- Does it sabotage my communion with God and my walk in the Spirit?
- Does it undermine or seek to displace my relationship to Christ as the power of my life?
- Does it attempt (is it designed) to do so?
- Does it feed the self-centered, appetite-driven, God-hating part of me called the flesh?
- Does it inflame my desire to disobey God's commands?
- Does it produce pride, contention, immorality, or any other behavior contrary to the love of God and the love of others?
- Does it lure me into obsession with what is earthbound and temporal versus what is heavenly and eternal?