

The World, The Flesh

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[0:00] The book we are studying is God's Words, Studies and Key Bible Themes by J.I. Packer. And the word that we are studying today is the word world.

These are words that are found in the Bible, words that God uses. And if God uses them, then we need to understand them because it's by use of words that God communicates His mind and His will to us.

So the word is world. Now that word has many different connotations. Indeed in scriptures as well, sometimes it can refer to the whole universe.

We speak of God creating the whole world and we mean the universe. Sometimes it can refer to all mankind, all sorts of men, to this earth, the planet earth.

But we're studying the word world today as it refers to the enemy of every Christian. The Christian fights a trio of enemies, the world, the flesh, that is indwelling sin, and the devil.

[1:06] And for the past two weeks we've studied sin first, and then last week the devil. We now come to the world. Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 2.

Sometimes you might think that where did that come from, this idea of the world, the flesh, and the devil as being our threefold enemy? Is that just something that a theologian came up with?

No, it's the teaching of God's word. And in this passage we have these three enemies mentioned together. See if you can spot them here in the opening verses of Ephesians 2.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world, and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature. The word there is flesh.

[2:14] Gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Now there you see all three of our enemies listed in one breath, as it were. And any one of these enemies is more than enough to defeat us on its own.

We couldn't stand against the devil, if that's all there was against us. We couldn't stand against the flesh, if that's all there was, or the world. But it's not just that we have three powerful enemies.

The bad news is that they're in cahoots together. That they join forces. They form a coalition to fight together against God and his people.

And that's something that multiplies their effectiveness far more than just three times over. Last week, Stan reminded us of the devil and how he likes to stay behind the scenes.

[3:19] And so he goes unrecognized. Why is that? Because he's the one, as he said, who's stirring up the pot of temptations. Or to change the metaphor, notice the three enemies and how they work together.

Satan baits the hook of temptation with something from the world that appeals to our sinful nature, our flesh.

You see how they work together? Satan baits the hook of temptation with something from the world. And he's got a lot to pick, doesn't he? That appeals to our flesh.

And so, together, these enemies strive against the Christian. Seeking to get us to disobey God. So, what has God in his word revealed about the world that we might be better equipped to overcome it?

[4:22] When the Bible warns us against the world as an enemy, what is it referring to? What is this enemy out there called the world?

The flesh and the devil. Okay, it certainly includes the flesh and the devil. John? Society. Society. Alright.

A world order. A world order. More of an idea of an organized, unified order. The system that excludes God.

Okay. The system that excludes God. No room for God in all their thoughts. The riches of the world. The riches of the world.

Alright. We're getting into the elements, all the elements of the world, insofar as they are used in a way that is against God.

[5:25] Because as we saw Sunday night, the riches of the world in and of themselves are not evil. But they can become part of this system that is used to pull us away from God and obedience to his commands.

Listen to several definitions on the world. The sum total of the unbelieving human race in hostile rebellion against God.

So, all of humanity, unconverted humanity, in its rebellion against God. Sinful humanity solidly given to unrighteousness and ungodliness, and hostile to the truth and the people of God.

Now, we can understand the world better as we see it in relation to these other two. To the devil and to the flesh.

So, let's consider first the world in its relation to the devil. And see if that doesn't shed light on what the world is like. Here in Ephesians 2 and verse 2, we see that the ways of the world are the same ways as the ways of the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

[6:42] He's the one at work in the children of disobedience. He's the one at work in those who are disobeying God. So, we learn that the world's ways are the same as the devil's ways.

He's the ruler of this world. Well, Satan is called the prince of this world. John 14, 30 and 1 John 5, 19 says that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

We're studying the world today. Last week, we studied the evil one, Satan. And if we would understand something of the world, we need to realize that the whole world is under the control of this devil that we saw last week.

Satan, who leads the whole world astray. Revelation 12, 9. So, that should give us insight into the world. We saw last week that the devil is pure evil.

There is nothing good in him. And now we're told that it is his ways that hold sway in the world. So, as nice and as friendly and as charming as society, the world, unconverted humanity, may look.

[7:52] At bottom, it is pure evil. It indeed has the same ways as the devil who holds it in bondage.

By looking at the coach, we can learn something about the team. By looking at the devil, we know something about the world where he holds sway.

And we see that the world then is led by the devil into this same hostile rebellion against God. So, by understanding the relation between the world and the devil, that he's the ruler of it, his ways or its ways, we've understood something of the world.

Now, let's consider the world and the flesh. How do these two relate? Over to Romans 8 and verse 7.

A verse that Dave gave us when we studied sin, indwelling sin, and the flesh. And here is the statement about the flesh. That is, man and his heart and his mind and his affections, his will.

[9:00] Unconverted man. Romans 8, 7. The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. So the flesh says no to every one of God's yeses. And it says yes to every one of God's noes. It will not, it cannot obey, submit to God's law.

It's in rebellion. It's a hostile rebellion, we're told. Now, you take that hostile rebellion that refuses to submit to God's laws, and you multiply it times all, the whole unbelieving population of the world, and you come to understand something about the world.

It is the flesh multiplied times every unbeliever. Someone is therefore referred to the world as our corporate flesh.

You have your flesh and you know something about it and how wicked it is and how much it opposes God and it's hostile to God. Well, you add it all up. The whole world, our corporate flesh.

[10:18] Packer comments, By reason of this hereditary inner twistedness, mankind is always at one in opposing God's rule. That's the world. Mankind at one in unity come together.

This is something they're agreed on. All nations, all mankind are agreed on this, that God is not to be obeyed. And so Psalm 2 speaks of that worldwide conspiracy and not an unbeliever in any nation of the world today has escaped this worldwide conspiracy that they're a part of in fighting against the Lord and His Christ, against God's kingdom and His King, Psalm 2 says.

So the world's ways are anti-God ways. They're hostile toward God. The flesh shows us that. Look at James chapter 4 and verse 4.

A verse that just shows us how opposite God and the world are. The world is anti-God. It's hostile to God, just as the flesh of every unbeliever making up the world.

James 4.4. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?

[11:51] Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. So we learn from Romans 8 that the sinful mind is hostile toward God.

It's enmity against God. And now we learn that the world is an enemy of God. And if you choose to be a friend of the world, you thereby have become an enemy of God.

There's no neutrality. There's no Switzerland here. There's no compromising position possible.

Friendship with the one is enmity with the other. So opposed is the world to God.

Now, the fact that the world is a system, that there's this unity of all these unbelievers, that they're agreed upon this, that we don't serve God.

We don't like God or His laws, His truth, His Savior. That working together of unbelieving humanity means that the world's ways often enjoy a certain credibility as their ways become institutionalized and widely accepted.

[13:04] So we think of the ways of the world. And when they become law of the land, they carry something of a weight. Because it's not just one depraved sinner weighing in, it's rather the institution weighing in.

Institutionalized humanity. So, for instance, in our land, we have laws that permit abortion. That's a very anti-God and His truth law.

But it carries some weight and acceptability because it is the law of the land. So the very institution of our legal system gives a certain credibility to the ways of the world, the anti-God ways of the world, the no-fault divorce, no-fault bankruptcy laws, homosexual marriage.

You see, as these things become the law of the land, then we see, again, just how heavy the weight that they carry because it's humanity against God working together.

Evolution enjoys the mass support of the media, of textbooks, of universities, powerful institutions in our world that lends a credibility to it.

[14:22] Ungodly positions can become company policy. And the fact that it's company policy, you see, the institutionalizing of it gives an air of acceptability.

Society has accepted this now, and yet it is still anti-God. But it carries a note of authority.

You understand what we're saying here? That it's because the world works together that it has such power. John Bunyan, in his Pilgrim's Progress, talks about the world and its power and its allurements.

He portrays the world as vanity fair. A fair held in the city of vanity. And there, the merchants are holding out all sorts of forbidden pleasures for pilgrims passing through.

And Bunyan says this, But if anyone going to the celestial city would miss this town of vanity, he must of necessity go out of the world.

[15:28] In other words, you're going through it. You can't get to heaven without going through vanity fair. We live in vanity fair. It is the world we live in.

I'd like to have read the whole section from Pilgrim's Progress. It even gives us a short outline of how to survive and how to live in vanity fair. You could read it on your own.

We don't have time this morning. But the point is this. We live in it. And so we must learn how to overcome it. Now, I think it's here that we need to appreciate a distinction between the people of God in the Old Testament and the people of God in the New Testament.

Not everything is equal. And here, an important distinction needs to be made. What was Old Testament Israel to do with the nations that were in the land of promise?

Destroy them. They weren't to make treaties with them, were they? They weren't to allow them to live in the land. Why not? They would turn them away from God.

[16:35] Turn them after their idols, after their ways of living that were anti-God. And so the answer was is you drive them out, you utterly destroy them, you don't enter into any treaties, you don't allow your sons and daughters to marry their daughters and sons because you're to be separate from the world.

So Israel was to separate themselves geographically, weren't they, from the nations of the world. They were a nation themselves. And they were to be separate geographically from the nations of the world lest they become a snare to them.

So a geographical separation was called upon by God. Now how is that different in the New Covenant? We're still called to separate ourselves from the world.

But is it a geographical separation? You say no, why not? The Great Commission go into the world and preach the world.

Mmm. Mmm. Okay, that's a powerful text. It's hard to think of separation being geographically when Jesus looks at His men and says, you go into the world and preach the gospel.

[17:51] How else do we know that it's not geographical? Jesus' prayer. Jesus' prayer? What? Don't take the mind of the world. Okay, let's turn to that passage in John chapter 17.

Again, we see the purpose of God for His people is stated here in Jesus' prayer. John 17 and verse 14.

We'll begin there. Let's start in verse 13 where Jesus is just on the eve of His crucifixion and He says, I am coming to you now.

He's talking to His Father in Heaven. But I say these things while I am still in the world so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them Your word and the world has hated them for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.

My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world even as I am not of the world.

[19:03] Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. As You sent me into the world I have sent them into the world. Okay, here we see clearly that though they do not belong to the world they are sent into the world.

It's the mission that they are on to go into this mass of unbelieving humanity and there to bring the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Matthew 5 You are the what?

The light of the world. And where does the light need to be? We are not on a distant planet beaming light to this wicked world.

A light is to be in the midst. You don't light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead you put it on its stand and it gives light to all that are in the house.

Let your light therefore so shine before men. Where? Before men. In front of men. Around men.

Where they see that light and they might see your good deeds. So you've got to be close enough to the world that they can see your good deeds.

[20:12] See the light. The change in your life. Many other passages could be called into mentioned Philippians 2 14 through 16.

Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.

Where are you? You are in a crooked and depraved generation. That's where I want you to be shining as light. The darkness needs the light and so you are to be light in the midst of this dark world.

1 Corinthians 5 9 and 10 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral or the greedy or swindlers or idolaters.

In that case you would have to leave this world. It's not that I don't want you in contact with unbelievers. No. I'm talking about the unbelieving professing Christian. You're to cut yourself off from him.

[21:26] The point is that God wants us in contact with the unbelieving crooked and adulterous world. Now worldliness is not something then to be measured by geographical boundaries.

Nor is it merely something external. some churches have almost defined worldliness in five or six things that the world does that we must not do.

And though the list changes it's primarily negative. And worldliness then becomes not doing certain things not smoking not drinking not dancing not gambling not playing cards not wearing certain hairdos as if refraining from doing these five or six things means that we are then not worthy or we are not worldly.

We've kept ourselves from worldliness. Now worldliness certainly includes abstaining from sinful behaviors of the world but it reaches far beyond that.

I may not be doing any of those five or six things that the church has identified as worldly and still be the most worldly man in the world because I'm thinking like the world.

[22:42] And I've got lust like the world and I've got pride like the world I've got self-righteousness like the world. Worldliness has to do with the fallen ways of this world.

It's spirit it's way of thinking it's valuing it's choosing listen to Packer on this this matter from this we can see what the nature of worldliness is and avoid the mistake of equating it with the use and enjoyment of created things as such.

Worldliness means yielding to the spirit that animates fallen mankind the spirit of self-seeking and self-indulgence without regard for God.

Whether a man is worldly thus depends not on how much enjoyment he takes from the good and pleasant things of this life but on the spirit in which he takes it.

If he allows these things to enslave him and become a God that is an idol in his heart then he is worldly. If on the other hand he is disciplined in his use of them not indulging to the detriment of his own or others edification nor losing his heart to them but receiving them gratefully as God's gift and as a means for showing forth his praise thanking God for all pleasant occupations and all delightful experiences and not letting the merely good elbow out the best then he is not worldly but godly.

[24:27] Again it is not worldly to be praised but it is worldly to live for men's compliments and applause and to find one's highest happiness in the thought that one is gratified men rather than in the knowledge that one has done God's will.

Worldliness is the spirit which substitutes some earthly ideal such as pleasure or gain or popularity for life's true goal which is in all things to praise and please God.

So we need to be clear on what worldliness is and not just equate it with the use of the things of this world. The world from which we are to separate is a way of life that fallen humanity substitutes for God's holy ways.

It's the world as an idol as a rival to God's word. So let's think where we've been. We've seen the world is this tremendous evil in cahoots with the flesh and the devil and yet God wants us in the world.

So to be in the world means that we're close enough to be exposed to its temptations that would pull us away from Christ and away from obedience to Christ's commands.

[25:51] So you see something of the demanding challenge to keep ourselves from worldliness. To be in the world but not of it. The difficulty is to live in the world without letting the world get into us.

It's like boating. The boat needs to be in the water. But if the water gets in the boat you're in trouble. And so you don't want to let the world get into your heart.

You are in the world but don't let the world get into your world. So James condemnation in chapter 4 and verse 4 against being a friend of the world.

It does not mean that we should not be the friend of sinners. Jesus was the friend of sinners. Does that mean he was the enemy of God? No. No.

We're not to be a friend of the anti-God system of the world. And if friendship with the world requires you to side against God and against his commands, well, then you've crossed the line.

[27:01] Jesus never did. Friend of sinners was his name. And yet, he was not a friend of this world and its evil system. Now, there's a downward current in the world.

It has a power to carry all before it. It's not easy to swim upstream, and yet that's what the Christian is called to do, to live in this world. Think with me just of the fact that we're called to live a non-conformist life, a counter-cultural way to live.

We're to live by the book. That's counter-cultural. That goes right against the stream today. Just to believe our memory verse for today is counter-cultural, that all things were made by him and for him.

That is as counter-cultural as you'll get. That is as non-conformist to the world system that you can get. So, we're called to live by the world.

We're called to live by faith, when everyone else is living by sight. We're called to live as citizens of heaven, and for the kingdom to come, when everyone else is living for the here and now.

[28:17] we're called to live for Jesus Christ, when everyone else is living for self. We're called to live according to the law of God, when everyone else is a law to themselves, and follows the standards of this world.

And so when you come to the Sermon on the Mount, and you read that famous sermon of the Lord Jesus, we're struck with just how counter-cultural it is.

Indeed, John Stott calls his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, something like the counter-cultural life. It's exactly opposite. It takes the world system and its way to live, and it turns it upside down and says, that's what it means to be a Christian.

The world says, you're great, you're wonderful. And Jesus starts by saying, blessed are the poor in spirit, the poverty of spirit.

And right on through the Beatitudes, they are absolutely counter-cultural, right through the sermon, you have heard that it has been said, this is the way the world lives today, but I say to you, and the but I say to you is the opposite as the way that they were living.

[29:37] That's what we're called to do. He says, the pagan world runs after all these things. But you're called to be different. You're called to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

And all these other things will be added to you as well. But the world, the system of the world is run after these things, preoccupied with earthly things, and forget God's kingdom.

Exactly opposite. The world loves those who love them. You're called to love your enemies. enemies. And on and on it goes.

If you're not willing to be different, you're not wanting to follow Jesus Christ. That's the sum total of the Sermon on the Mount. You can't come to any other conclusion at the end of that sermon. That if you want to follow Jesus, you're going to have to get used to being different from the world.

And so these things ought to inform our expectation on how the world will treat us. If we've studied a little bit then, done our homework about the nature of the world and what we're called upon to be and to do, what can we expect from this world?

[30:50] What's your expectation? How do you expect society to treat you? Pat you on the back? Way to go, boy. You're doing a good job. No, if we take seriously the word of God, we should be surprised when society pats us on the back.

And we should rather expect ill treatment from the world. John 15, 18. If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

Who hated him? The world. Why? Because I go on testifying that everything the world does is evil. John 7, 7. So, our expectation should be, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. There's the two forces that don't mix.

And so John says in 1 John 3 and verse 13, don't be surprised if the world hates you. Why are we so surprised when we're mistreated by the world and our jobs when we're not understood, we're misunderstood, we're caricatured, people take our words out of context, they twist them, they make us say things we never say.

[32:17] Why do we get all upset as if we're surprised? This isn't fair. That's what Jesus said would happen because we live a countercultural life, a nonconformist way.

And so it's important to remember our identity here. We're pilgrims. Where? In this world. This is not our home. We're aliens and strangers here.

We're strangers in the world, 1 Peter 1, 1 and 1 Peter 2, 11. So think of yourself that way. I don't belong here.

This isn't my home. These are not my people. This is not my society. I am looking for a heavenly kingdom. kingdom. And that is my home.

And the people of God are my people. The world. The enemy of the Christian.

[33:19] Now, God has given us very clear instructions and commands concerning our relation to the world. We've been more or less defining the problem. And now we're going to get into the prescription.

How is it that we live in this world in such a way as to not be polluted by it, as to not love it, as to not be overcome by it? How do we overcome this world? These texts are too many to rush through this morning, so we'll keep them for next time.

I wonder if there's any comments or questions as to anything that we've covered this morning. Stir up any question in your mind about the world, what it is, what its agenda is, why it's so hard for us to be in the world and not to be contaminated by it.

Any thoughts or questions? Lane? I don't know all mine with the same members who are worldly. You don't want to be wanting to quit them and shine your light for them but you know it's awesome. I think it's always been helpful to remember that God is not against nature.

[34 : 39] You're related to your brothers and sisters by nature in an earthly way. God's not against earthly things. And so there's nothing wrong with that.

What he's against is fellowship with darkness and the ways of the world. So there's a fine line to walk there for you to have brother-sister fellowship with someone that's unconverted is not wrong. There were people in Corinth that took this separation principle so far that they said, oh, I'm married to an unbeliever. I guess I should get a divorce. And that's the whole argument in 1 Corinthians 7. No, no, if they're willing to have you live with them, you are to live with them. You're not just trying to break off natural relations with people because they're unconverted. You're not to not work in a shop where unbelievers are the bosses.

No, that's not what he's saying. It's not that. Rather, he's saying, don't so mix with them that you take on their ways and if their sinful ways begin to influence you, you've crossed a line.

[35 : 54] Now, we'll all draw the line differently. I mean, you may draw it in one place and I might draw it in another and we need to give each other leeway on where we draw the line. But I think there's two extremes that we need to be aware of and that is that we don't reject people because they're sinners.

We see Jesus eating with sinners, don't we? And he took a lot of flack from it from the holy rollers of the day, the Pharisees. And he taught us many parables in Luke 15.

I've come to seek and to save that which is lost. The sick need the physician. That's why I'm here. Because they're sick and that's why I'm with them. So we dare not cross that line and separate ourselves and just lob gospel volleys over a citadel and some castle where we hold ourselves into. No, we're to permeate the culture. But we're to go into the world like Jesus went in. To win it. To stay light and pure. And to expose the darkness.

To call them to Christ. And that's the challenge. And it's not easy to sit down with unconverted family members perhaps and to take some of their guff and to hear them profane the name of Christ and to hear the things that they're saying.

[37 : 13] That's not easy to be in those contexts. But don't just bail and say, well, I'm to be separate from the world. You're called to the minister to the world. But the other side is don't become like them.

Don't let the world get into you. And if you have a propensity to stumble and fall, Jesus says, we need to pluck out right eyes and cut off right hands.

We don't want to tempt ourselves unnecessarily. But please, that doesn't mean that we stay away from all worldly temptations. We couldn't live in this world.

And that's what Paul says. You'd have to go out of the world if you had nothing to do with immoral people. That's not the plan. Anyone else like to respond to Lane's question? Raj?

Okay, that is a different issue, isn't it?

[38 : 28] what you can handle as a converted man, perhaps, in that context, may not be what your unconverted son or daughter can handle. And you might have to draw the line sharper for a young person.

That's a legitimate distinction to draw. Again, we're not going to be able to draw those lines. We're not even talking about any one issue. But I trust that we'll see the principle.

We're called to minister in the world, let our light shine in the world, without the world conforming us to it. And where we see that danger, we do need to put some distance between us and the world.

Ticklish issues, aren't they? They probably find us often before the throne of grace crying for wisdom, don't they? Lord, help us to know what to do in this case.

All right, any other comments, questions? Well, we'll look then next week at how to do battle, how to not fall and become the victim of the world.

[39:34] We're dismissed.