

# Worldliness: the Christian dilemma

What does it mean to be 'worldly'? If you are not sure, then I'll give you the definition according to the dictionary:

Worldly is relating to or devoted to the temporal world.

In another definition, which I liked even better, to be worldly is to be:

Engrossed in or concerned with the affairs of this life.

So, what what does it mean to be "engrossed in or concerned with the affairs of this life"?

Let's take a look at a range of behaviours. Do any of these behaviours make one engrossed with the affairs of life?

- Loving eating, not just for necessity but love the idea as much as the act of eating;
- Watching movies or a good documentary;
- Following a particular sport or team;
- Travelling, whether interstate or abroad;
- Keeping up with the latest fashion; or
- Staying informed and reading or watching the news on a daily basis

## The current state of the world

While you're thinking about that, let's have a think about the state of the world.

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The world is full of false religions.

Jesus said:

"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No-one comes to the Father, except through Me" (John 14:6).

He made no mention about Allah, Buddha, the many Hindu gods, any statues or images of any other man made god.

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The world is centred on false values

How you dress; how you look; whether you're fit and healthy seems to have far more importance to others than the inward qualities of a person. Whereas God says He does judges differently: man looks at the outward appearance, while God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). We are quick to measure that person's worth by their materials and not by their spiritual worth.

Everyone's soul is valuable to God—whether they are a millionaire or homeless; whether they are 'successful' or 'a failure' in the world's eyes.

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The world has distributed wealth disproportionately

There is a small band of elite and rich people that are outnumbered by the poor and destitute. We are happy to spend millions of dollars to host international events, rock concerts, dress fashionably, celebrate TV and sporting celebrities. Yet we still can't quite figure out how to stamp out world hunger.

Doesn't it seem that the world is messed up?

## **Shouldn't we love the world God created?**

I've got to ask. Is there anything wrong with being concerned about the affairs of the world? After all, I was born into this world; I live my life here; I interact with the world; I work here; I married here; and I will most certainly die here. So, what's wrong with me being 'worldly'? Did God not create this world for us and all that is in it? Did He not say, after each individual day of creation, 'It is good?'

Should I not love this world? It's God's creation, after all.

The world is God's creation. At a brief moment in our world's history, that statement was true. A time when it was good to love all what God had created – but it was a brief time in this world's history.

## **Something changed in God's good world**

Gen 1:31 says that God saw everything that He had made and it was very good. And if it was good enough for God, then it must have been truly awesome for His first creation.

But what happened? We all know the story very, very well. Satan, our old adversary, caused Eve to sin, Eve caused Adam to sin and as a result, we now live in a sinful world. Sin entered that perfect world that God had created.

You see, there was a time when you could say that Adam and Eve were 'Godly' in their relationship and attitude towards God. But as soon as they gave in to sin, their attitudes became 'worldly'. They gave in to their own desires rather than follow God's desire.

It's no wonder that most of us struggle with the concept of living in this world while trying not to allow ourselves to be so worldly. It's hard! It's difficult to expect to go against your natural desires and detach yourself from worldly pleasures.

As you will discover, ultimately an attachment to this sinful world will lead to your destruction. Loving the pleasures of this world more than God Himself, will result in losing your salvation. I can't be more blunt than that.

## God has a plan

My aim is not to turn you away from this world or even make you hate it, but to open your eyes to see the state that we are all in and accept that God has a finite plan for this world. Did you notice that I said finite and not infinite? God's already decided that He will destroy this world and all its sins once and for all. How much you love this world will determine on what side of God's plan you want to be.

I know most of you love your country. I love the country I was born in, and I love the country I now reside in. But there will come a time when God will exact His judgement on your country, my country and every other country in this world. Will the love for your country be your Christian dilemma?

## What does the Bible say?

It's all well and good to examine the world, and to think through its positives and negatives, but as Christians, what I really want to know is: What does God say?

If we can all agree that, as Christians, this book (the Word of God), should be our standard in the way we lead our lives, then it's only natural that what it says about worldliness should be how we must view the world. So what does the Bible say about being worldly?

Like everything else about our Christian life, your personal relationship with God, your own salvation, your commitment to God etc, those decisions are entirely up to you. You can either take what the Bible says and apply it to your life or simply ignore it.

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### The ruler of this world

“I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me” (John 14:30).

Let's make one thing clear. Since man's fall at the garden of Eden, Satan has claimed this world as his own. Often referred to as the prince of this earth, Satan has made our world his home.

Don't you think it's ironic? That Satan should claim this world as his own, when both he and this world will one day be destroyed forever? Seems rather fitting, doesn't it?

The first thing we need to remember is that our world is governed and influenced by an evil and soul destroying spirit. Don't ever forget that. As much as you may love your nation, always remember that Satan claims this world as his own—it will remind you who is actually infiltrating our nations and influencing the decisions most world leaders make.

The second thing to remember is that since the world is under the sway of Satan, the little good that is produced and comes out of this world is often despised, hated or forgotten.

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## The world's hatred for Christ

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

It's no coincidence that the world, led by Satan, hates Christ.

Let me ask you a controversial question:

Have you ever imagined for one brief second, as inconceivable as it may be, of ever hating Christ?

That idea is so foreign to me that I struggle to even force a single thought of hate for the one Redeemer who willingly died on the cross for me.

And yet, there are those who knowingly do the enemy's bidding, hating Christ and as a result, they will hate you too.

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## If you are Christ's, the world hates you too!

“If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19).

Because you chose to turn your back on the world, its silly traditions, shallow values, evil actions, and have decided to follow Christ, the world hates you too.

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## Valuing eternity

“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25).

We must remember that nothing in this world lasts forever. We are to hate (i.e. *love less*) our lives ***in this*** world – not your life, for that belongs to God, but your lives in this world. So we are called to recognize that the world does not offer us anything of lasting value. Nothing can replace your eternal salvation.

I know a few people that for them amassing wealth, material objects and other objects is the be all and end all. Being debt-ridden, they have become slaves to consumerism and are caught up in vicious cycles to buy more, waste more and then start all over again. So consumed by the need to keep up with the latest fads, some people are willing to even sell their salvation. They give up God for personal gain. Personal gain that will slip like sand through their fingers, leaving them with nothing of value.

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What value is there in gaining the world?

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26).

“For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” (1 Timothy 6:7–8)

We’re all being programmed by media, advertising and social expectation to buy more and consume more.

I encourage you to re-read the Gospels and familiarise yourself with how Christ and His disciples travelled during their Ministry. Their mode of transport—among other things—teaches us a lesson against consumerism. Notice the conditions under which they travelled. Notice the luxuries they enjoyed. Notice where they slept. Notice how they were treated. Notice what motivated them.

I can assure you, the need to purchase more goods and amass wealth was not one of their motivating factors.

Also remember, Jesus’ Kingdom is not of this world. It will be far better than the most beautiful part of the world you’ve ever been to. It will be permanent, in other words ‘eternal’ and it is being set up for you and me.

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God’s kingdom is not of this world

“In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:2–3).

What makes this world such a temporary home is that God has already planned to judge the earth and its inhabitants, and since He can’t tolerate sin it will be blotted out of His sight. It’s that simple. I’m not going to lie to you, sugar coat it or deceive you – the world we live in now will cease to exist.

Your flat screen tvs, your smart phones, your car, your house, your fashionable clothes, your manicured garden, your prized possessions – all will be destroyed. So all those

years striving to amass all this wealth and the objects of our desire will amount to what? Nothing.

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Our life in this world is temporary

King Solomon wrote about the meaningless of the world. He said,

“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Eccl 1:2– 3).

The sooner you understand how meaningless some of our activities are, the sooner you can come to terms that what really matters in your life right here, right now is not the ‘things’ of this world but your relationship with God.

The world is temporary, your salvation is eternal.

“Man is like a breath, his days are like a passing shadow” (Psalm 144:4).

## **Whose approval do we seek?**

I’m almost certain of the counter argument I would receive whenever we speak about ‘worldliness’.

Predictable questions like, ‘What’s wrong with having wealth, a house or two, couple of cars, keeping up with the latest fashion, belonging to a club or two, visiting night clubs, partying away til dawn?’, or even, ‘We can’t be sombre and boring all the time!’.

What’s wrong?

Now, in and of themselves, doing these things may not be wrong. But they become wrong when they are not done in a godly way. For example, when they consume all your time so that you become indistinguishable from a person of the world, and unlike a son or daughter of God.

Now you might remind me that King David danced, right?

But how did he dance and for whom?

He danced in a way that was pleasing to God. He danced because he was so overjoyed that the only way he could express his joy was through dance.

How many scantily clad, half drunk or drug addicted young guys or girls are dancing to please God? Would you rather conform to this world or to God?

“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10).

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## Godlessness in the last days

This next verse I'm about to read was a prophecy way back then when the Apostle Paul wrote this, imagine his horror at knowing that what he wrote, as received by God, has actually come true.

“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people” (2 Timothy 3:1–5).

Can anyone here deny that what Paul wrote has come true?

Have we really become lovers of ourselves rather than lovers of God?

Worldliness makes you—and apologies for the use of strong language—‘spiritually stupid.’ So engrossed are we with the things of this world that rather than sharpen our minds with God’s Word, we dull our senses with the pleasures of the world.

And when I speak these words I’m more than happy to include myself too.

When I say that being worldly makes us ‘spiritually stupid,’ I could easily qualify as a great candidate for that. Do you know how many hours I could spend studying God’s Word more and developing my relationship with God, if I just walked away from doing the things I want?

But it’s so hard. And I have no-one to blame but myself. Are any of you game enough to admit the same?

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## Worldliness opposes godliness

“Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness’” (1 Corinthians 3:18, 19).

Worldliness is the complete opposite of Godliness. They are poles apart. If Satan is the prince of this corrupted world and he stands in opposition to God, then worldliness must be evil. And God gives no place to sin.

Worldliness also tries to outsmart God and explain where the Bible is at fault.

Worldly wisdom tries to explain how we evolved from apes and were not created by a loving Creator. It seems some people would rather identify with an ape than the image of our Father.

Worldly wisdom justifies its actions and does away with God's laws, which is why we live in a society given over to lusts of the flesh, violence, abuse of alcohol (because apparently it's cool to be drunk) and live like life's one big party. People today are sadly living their life by the same philosophy the ancient Romans once did:

"Eat, drink and be merry, because tomorrow we die" (Isaiah 22:13).

How sad. How sad that one's life is summed up in a simple sentence of pointless activity that brings absolutely nothing but destruction.

Have a look at what James has to say.

"You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

You have a choice to make. Live and love this fading world and you risk fading with it or live and love God and live with Him, forever.

James goes on to say that "anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4). The Apostle James uses strong words, like hatred and enemy, to really drive home the point that we can be in the world or in His kingdom, but it's impossible to be in both.

It's true, most of us are no angels and we'd have to admit that living in the world and not being part of it is a serious struggle for most of us (Ephesians 4:14, 15).

After all I've said about this world and its current state, let me offer you this interesting perspective. The world does have a lot of good to offer.

I know not many people appreciate the same things I do. It's impossible not to see God's hand behind the beauty that surrounds us. The mountains that I can see from our backyard, the birds that visit our garden, the clear blue skies, the plants and trees that are grow in our place—all this reminds me that we do live in a world in which God has visibly left His imprint.

However, don't let your appreciation of what God had created for us govern your life. Our focus shouldn't be in the things of this world, if so, it will consume you. The pretty lights, the pleasurable drinking and partying, the need to buy more, more and more.

## **Where should our focus be?**

Our focus should be on God, developing that relationship with God – I promise you, it's an investment that will outlast any earthly investment you've made, ever.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19–21).

“Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days” (James 5:3).

If at all possible, don't feel obliged to follow the popular fads of this world, such as piercing many parts of your body, tattoos or substance abuse. According to the Bible, our bodies are a living temple to the Lord. How can we expect the Holy Spirit to reside in a temple that has been defiled?

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

I know it's not easy to accept, but leaving those worldly things behind will give you the courage to stand up like Paul and say:

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).

Those worldly things that once occupied your life are dead. You replace them with Christ – our eternal promise.

And to conclude

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15–17).