

“THE WORLD”

The item directly below is the first part of a symposium—“**FOES OF THE NEW CREATION IN THE LAST DAYS**”—Robert Alexander had the first part. Convention of Associated Bible Students of Metropolitan Detroit, Saturday, April 5, 1975.)

Brethren, it is our joy to be here among you and to consider with you the admonitions of the Spirit that will help us be better and more ably serve our Heavenly Father after we leave the convention tomorrow evening.

The WORLD as a foe of the New Creation is a formidable enemy as are all three, but as our experience has proved, the scriptures to be correct—the world is a monstrous enemy. We read—1 John 2:15, 16, “Love not the world [*cosmos*], neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For 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.” In Rom. 12:2 the Apostle Paul tells us that we are not to be conformed to this world (*aion*) “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.” The Apostle Paul continues in 1 Cor. 1:20, 21 to show us that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. 1 Cor. 3:18, “Because God has made the wisdom of this world foolishness.”

The Lord makes several things clear to us in terms of the world. First of all, we are to have nothing to do with it in terms of our affections, our standards, neither the things that are in the world. Not only is the spirit of the world wrong, but much of what that spirit has produced is equally wrong. We are to separate ourselves from them. The quality of the world’s wisdom and spirit is deficient, as compared to God’s wisdom and spirit. And then, it is important to recognize that God’s wisdom and spirit are so much ahead and so much above the world and its spirit that we can concentrate on it. It is not as though the world produces a vacuum—it is as though we are so imbued with the Holy Spirit, so involved and committed to the Heavenly Father, that we don’t have time, attention or interest in the world.

But then, what is the world? In our warnings, you will note that we read two scriptures that use the word “world” but from two different Greek words. “*Cosmos*” means the order and arrangement of things; and “*Aion*” means the age, dispensation or period of time, as in Rom. 12:2. This latter usage occurs in Matt. 13:22 where it talks about the cares of the world; the sons of the world as in Luke 16:8 and 20:34; and the rulers of the world as in 1 Cor. 2:6-8; the wisdom of this world as in 1 Cor. 1:20; the fashions of this world as in Rom. 12:2; the character of this world as in Gal. 1:4 and the god of this world as in 2 Cor. 4:4. (We will hear more about this later.)

The arrangement or order of things and the nature of the times in which we live then are our enemies. So it is not only the time in which we live, not only the order and society in which we live—it is the combination of both of them, that is our enemy and that leads us way out on a limb. ONLY the Lord can keep us and protect us. When we are talking about the world as an enemy of the New Creation, and try to consider it in terms of the context of the other two enemies—the flesh and the devil—it seems that we are unable to keep one enemy totally separate from the others. They seem very, very much involved with each other because certainly the devil and the flesh use the world as an enemy to the advantages of their evil purposes. But one of the things that we discover when we consider the world, is that it is a passive enemy. The devil has an intellect. So do we in our own minds and in our fleshly interests. But the world has an influence on us—it does not have a mind of its own in terms of attacking us. The devil can use it, and he does use it against us; and our flesh can compromise with it; but the spirit of the world has not an intellect of its own to get at us directly.

Now we ask, Doesn't that contradict the scripture that talks about the "wisdom of this world" being foolishness with God? The wisdom of this world has not set out to destroy the New Creation. The wisdom of this world has set out to promote its own ambitions and its own desires—if that were to succeed, it would destroy the New Creation. Our flesh has every intent to destroy the New Creation—only by its destruction of the New Creation, can the flesh preserve itself. And so with the devil—only by the intellectual desire to destroy the New Creation can the devil survive. And so the enemy of the world, is, in a sense, a passive enemy but also a monstrous one.

We are born into this world—society is all around us, and therefore, in a sense, we are a part of it. In John 8:23 the Lord himself said that we are "of this world." We have inherited from it. Jesus said he was "not of this world"—He did not inherit from it. And therefore we are to leave it, just as Jesus was separate from it. We separate ourselves from it. And he emphasized the surrounding nature of the world in the parable of Matt. 13:38 where he talks about the mingling of the wheat and the tares. We are sown in the world.

The spirit of the world has developed because of the curse on man. It is a spirit of competition—to get all we can for ourselves. Then we call it "need." We have to have our needs satisfied, but our needs unfortunately keep growing as the minimal needs are satisfied. Then all of a sudden I need to take an up-step and we need more and more and more—the spirit of the world, the spirit of competition. The whole concept of advertising and the profit motive are related to the spirit of the world. It promotes greed and selfishness. It promotes comparisons. It promotes ambitions for power, for comfort and luxury. We are to lay this aside as the Apostle Paul tells us in Heb. 12:1—lay aside "every weight and the besetting sin that doth so easily beset us." The Apostle Paul encourages us to count all things as loss and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of

Christ. In Eccl. 6:11, 12 the prophet tells us that we see many things in life—“Seeing that there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?” As things become more and more attractive to us, but how are we bettered by them? Good for man—who knoweth what is good for man? Who can tell what shall be after a man under the sun? It helps us to see that all things that the world and the flesh and the devil would encourage us to achieve that would separate us from the knowledge and love of Christ, are going to be dried up and blown away. Therefore they are tests to the New Creation—to keep ourselves separate. They are tests of our values to see whether our objectives, our intents, the precious things that we have in life, are of the world or of the spirit. In Psalm 73:2 and Matt. 6:25-34 the Lord gives us very practical lessons in the applications of our values.

We wanted to spend some time this afternoon in talking about what the spirit of the world does to us. We know the scriptures instruct us that it is wrong—we are to make ourselves separate from it. But how does it affect us in our lives? How can we recognize the fact that it is having an encroachment on us—that it is making inroads or progress into the New Creation? We’ll have to hurry because by study I discovered the monstrousness of our enemy, the world, and it would require an afternoon or a whole convention to discuss all the ways in which the world can encroach upon the New Creation and distract us from the intent of our consecration and sacrifice. We will consider a few of the ways.

First of all, the spirit of the world distracts us from the primary goal of the church—to love righteousness. It does this by distracting or confusing things—making things appear as right when they are not right at all, things the world accepts as right. And the things of the world are degrading more rapidly than they have ever before; except in Noah’s time and the time of Sodom and Gomorrah. But they are certainly degrading very fast. Therefore what was wrong yesterday, may be right today, and will be right tomorrow—according to the world. Well that sort of changing and confusion distracts us. We have to uphold the standards of purity; and with all this weight trying to pull us down, everyday it gets heavier and heavier. And therefore, the intent to keep to the standards of righteousness has to be exercised all the more diligently to be successful. In Phil. 3:13-19 the Apostle reminds us that “this one thing I do.” If we could just keep that standard of purity and righteousness ever before us, then we would be ashamed to be engrossed in earthly things.

Another way that it distracts us—the spirit of the world, our enemy—is that it tends to encourage us to measure spiritual achievement in terms of earthly advantage, temporal qualities. In James 2:1-4 the Apostle reminds us that we are not to have respect of persons. A man with a gold ring or fine apparel, or a position of elegance or a position of note indicate that the world may accept the brethren in various kinds of positions. None of this should be the basis on which we evaluate our brethren. Unfortunately it has a tendency to. And brethren, let us be warned that we are using earthly values, values that

other people in the world have encouraged us to see and admire, as values for judgment in the New Creation. Our talent, or show, possessions, polish, nationalism, education, a good job, oratory—all of these are worldly achievements. And they can be used for the advancement of the New Creation; but they should never be a basis of judgment of spiritual development. In 2 Cor. 5:14 to 17—“the love of Christ constrains us, therefore we are to know no man after the flesh;” and in order to help us get the idea, the Apostle says we knew Jesus after the flesh at one time, but now we don’t know him after the flesh any more. We are certainly not to know anybody of less quality than He after the flesh. The comparisons among the brethren, unfortunately are side effects of this, using the standards of the world as our quality judgments. In Matt. 18:1-4 we have a record of which the early disciples were guilty of comparisons; and Jesus told them that they did not know what spirit was controlling them—it was the spirit of the world. They wouldn’t know, of course, until they had the begetting of the Holy Spirit.

Another way that we might use the spirit of the world to our detriment as new creatures is a misuse of our spiritual blessings in the advancement of the interests of the flesh, rather than to the advancement of our spiritual interests. As an example: frequently we learn how to think more clearly after we come into the truth. Many of us could not think clearly before we understood the truth. In time we learned how to think clearly from one point to another logical point: it’s how we apply the ransom; it’s how we understand the sin offering; it’s how we understand the establishment of the kingdom and the process of sanctification. All of these points require clear thinking which all the wisdom of the seminaries has not brought to light. It is the wisdom of God that has given us this understanding. Now this pattern that God has given us has an obvious influence on our other thinking habits. When we get into a job situation, or whatever, we become better thinkers; we can think more clearly and we are better people as a result. For what do we use the advantage that we get from a better job position? Do we use it for greater luxury? Do we use it for greater comfort? Or do we take the advantages the Lord has given to us, as a side benefit of our consecration, and use it directly in His service?

Another way that the enemy attacks us is to push us to strive for our necessities and to constantly redefine our necessities. Our apparent needs frequently are compared to what our neighbors have—as opposed to what we absolutely need to be effective students of the scriptures in order to be effective watchmen in Zion. And what are our future needs: What will our worries be in preparing for the future? In 1 Cor. 7:29, 30 and Col. 3:1-3 the Lord is telling us that spirituality produces indifference to worldly goods. And is that really what has happened to us? If we still have a love for the things of the world (not that we can’t appreciate good things), but if we have a love for them, then that spirituality has not prospered us effectively.

In 2 Tim. 1:7, 8—“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of

me his prisoner, but be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God.” Does the spirit of a sound mind help us to sacrifice more? I have heard that scripture used many many times and misused by suggesting that we use wisdom, that we have to protect ourselves, and unfortunately the protection was of the flesh rather than the advancement of the spirit. But is that what the scripture says in verse 8? “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.” Be not thou therefore, because you have the spirit of a sound mind and you are promoting the spirit rather than the flesh. Therefore it keeps us from dealing unwisely with worldly commitments in the light of our knowledge of future events. If we work as though tomorrow were the last day, as we should be working, the Lord will take care of it. If we are wise and careful we can prudently prepare for the future by considering what we absolutely need as a bare minimum and working only to that. Then everything else is directly in the Lord’s service.

The spirit of the world encourages us to be ashamed of witnessing. The spirit of the world makes us feel embarrassed when people take advantage of us or laugh at us. We have all had that; but what about our reputation? What is happening to it? In John 12:43, because we love the praises of men more than of God, God was very unhappy with us. And in John 15:19—“We should not be loved by the world, because we are not part of the world.” If this is not an integral part of our lives, not a real part of our attitude, then the spirit of the world, as our enemy, is winning. We must desire God’s approval only.

The spirit of the world also promotes confusion in the Christian mind, making it difficult to concentrate or to think clearly on spiritual matters, or to maintain spiritual integrity. The problem of assimilation is an old problem among the Lord’s people. It started back in Abraham’s time. The Lord said “Get up out of the land in which you live, and go to a land that I will show you.” Abraham really had to leave it; and all his posterity, both spiritual and natural, have had the same problem. The problem of natural Israel was that they allowed the spirit of their neighbors to come in on them and they fraternized with their neighbors. The same problem is true of Spiritual Israel. Look what has happened to nominal spiritual Israel as a result of the assimilation problem. In 2 Cor. 6:14-18 the Lord emphasizes the dangers of these assimilations and compromises.

Because of the confusion in our minds, the spirit of the world makes us too tired, too busy, too interested, too committed to other things to devote enough time for as much growth as we are capable. It is commonly known in professional circles, that if one will devote only half an hour every day to his profession, in three months he will become an expert. Why? Because the rest of his profession is lazy. And that’s true with us. If we will devote one-half hour of good hard study every day (we should be devoting much more than that), but if we would devote at least half an hour every day, religiously, prayerfully to deep study we would become experts. Luke 14:17-25 shows how fleshly pursuits can sway us away from immediate sacrifices for the Lord. Our world, as an

enemy, distracts worship with our brethren from spiritual to worldly interests. We can look back on the fellowship of this last meal time, and see what we talked about, what engaged our own minds. How much of that was necessary relative to the flesh, and how much of it could be put to the side so that the time and conversation could be used more effectively in dealing with spiritual matters? It is interesting to note that the Lord so frequently uses the interests of his people on spiritual matters as a point to which he draws near to them. Bro. Seklemian mentioned earlier this morning about the disciples on the way to Emmaus—what were they discussing? They were discussing spiritual matters. And it was then that the Lord drew near to them. In Luke 22:32 we read: “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” The Lord wasn’t interested in Peter promoting the flesh among the brethren. He was interested in Peter being converted, and then helping the brethren in spiritual matters. And in Rom. 14:1 we are told to receive the weak in faith but not to doubtful disputations. Don’t just get argumentative because you have a point of difference. And I think it is the spirit of the world that emphasizes our differences among us as opposed to our similarities in belief. That would encroach and make us enemies, make us malicious and encourage evil attitudes and evil spirits among us.

Gossip is another way that the spirit of the world is encouraged in us. In Lev. 19:16 we are told that we are not to be talebearers; and in Prov. 20:19 we are to stay away from gossip because it leads to evil speaking. The spirit of the world would also have us adopt the standards of the world in our conduct. I have two pet peeves. Perhaps some of you know us well enough to know that we have as much struggle with it as anyone else, and therefore can’t point the finger at anyone. But number one in our physical appearance—do we dress modestly. I would encourage all of us when we go shopping for clothes or when we go shopping for a house or a car, to keep the modesty and lack of conspicuousness as a central guideline. And I would particularly encourage the sisters to wear dresses that are below the knees (I know I am not going to make any friends by saying this), but I encourage it because it’s distracting, particularly when a sister is sitting in a meeting and the dress does not cover her knees. The second point of the worldly standards that we have difficulty with among the church is that our children are sometimes distracting. When we come to conventions; when we come to meetings, we have to imbue in them a joy in faith. We have to encourage them in rejoicing in the truth. Unfortunately, we very often neglect our children in this way. We don’t help them appreciate that conventions are Holy Convocations of God’s people. Children running in and out of meetings are a distraction and that is very inappropriate. And on the other side of the coin, brethren, I feel that those who do not have children should not sit in the back rows; because those brethren who come into the meeting with children (because they need to), frequently have to come up in front where they are in a distracting position because there are no seats left in the back rows. And it is the parents with children that are trying to get into the meetings that are usually the last into the meetings. So we can help each other in this way.

Another point in which we fail, is in giving our children the joys of the truth to help them and instruct them in the truth. And then we sometimes say that the children have to make their own decisions as to what religion they are to follow or whether they are going to consecrate to the Lord. They can't make a wise decision, brethren, if you have not properly instructed them by the time they are 18, and that starts when they are little and I mean in the first years of their lives—not to wait until they are 13 or 15 to start instructing them.

Again we neglect opportunities to serve each other as Mary poured out the ointment on our Lord. We should be doing it especially now to the feet members, as she did it to His head and his feet. And then a lack of diligence in our study. The spirit of the world would keep us away from diligent study particularly the leaders in Zion, the elders are responsible for this. Knowledge is God-given. We hear the argument frequently, "Well, I'm not a student, I cannot grasp these deep concepts of the truth." That is quite beside the point. None of us are so wise that we can get the truth by ourselves. Every one of us got the truth because we studied hard, and we prayed for it, and the Lord gave it to us. He overcame all the shortcomings that even the best of us have and gave us the truth in spite of ourselves. So He can make the worst of us look good and he can make the best of us look good, because he has seen in us a diligent desire to have the truth at great cost to ourselves. None of us have the talent to have the truth, without the Lord giving it to us. So we cannot use that as an excuse—that is a worldly excuse. In 2 Tim. 2:15 and Rom. 12:11 the Lord encourages us to be diligent and not slothful in business or the proper translation is—"not idle in study."

In summary, the net effect of the spirit of the world is to dilute or to distract us from total self-sacrifice and full attention to the work of our consecration. The urgency of our separateness from the world is emphasized by our Lord in his prayer in John 17. There are 14 references in that single chapter in Jesus' prayer to keep separate from the world. It was the burden of Jesus' last prayer in behalf of his disciples.

May our Heavenly Father find full cooperation in our hearts as He tries to answer Jesus' prayer to keep us separate from the world. Let us recognize any influence that the spirit of the world may have on us—rejecting it, hating it because it is evil—not just separating ourselves intellectually from it. Let us get on with the full attention and the energy to the advancement of the New Creation and the business of our consecration. May the Lord so help us to do, because we cannot do it alone.