

The Power of the Gospel

10

Not Of This World

Read John 17:14-16

In this prayer to his Father, Jesus makes a defining statement about your life:

“[You] are not of the world, even as I am not of it.”

We are *in* the world, but not *of* the world. This truth is the foundation of a genuinely Christ-like life. Just as Christ was not of the world, yet in it, so we also are not of the world, yet in it.

It is only after stating so clearly that you are not *of* this world, that Jesus then declares he is sending you *into* the world.

Read John 17:18

There is a clear connection between these two elements of Jesus’ prayer. We can never be sent *into* the world, until we have been brought *out* of the world. All too many Christians lack this basic revelation of their new relationship to the world. They are in the world *and* of the world. This is what the Gospel has been designed to change.

What is the World?

We need to understand what the biblical term “world” means before we can truly comprehend what the Bible means when it says we are *in* the world but not *of* the world. The term “world” has two meanings in Scripture:

- The people of the world
- The system of the world

As we shall see, there is a clear difference between the two definitions. This is why the Bible says that God loves the world (**John 3:16**), yet elsewhere it commands us *not* to love the world (**1 John 2:15**). In the first reference, the Bible is referring to the *people* of the world; in the second reference, it is referring to the *system* of this world. Both definitions of “world” refer to the sum total of fallen humanity, but as the old saying goes:

“We are to love the people, but not the sin.”

In this way, all we are doing is reflecting God’s own attitude toward the world. He loves the people with an intensity of love that sent Jesus into the world, but he hates the sin of the world with an equal intensity and to such a degree that he declares that anyone who loves this world’s system is, by default, an enemy of God (see **James 4:4**).

A Quick Recap

In the last lesson, we saw how Paul counselled his “true son in the faith” (**1 Timothy 1:2**) to avoid the world’s corruption that had sought to infiltrate the Church.

Read 1 Timothy 6:3-11

We saw that Paul’s instruction to Timothy in **verse 11** involved two vital actions:

- *Flee* from the world’s corruption
- *Pursue* the nature of God

We see a mirror of this dual action of *fleeing* and *pursuing* in Peter’s letter (read again **2 Peter 1:4**), but Peter calls it *escaping* and *participating*. It is absolutely vital to understand that these two elements are flip sides of the same coin – and that coin is called *repentance*.

- *Fleeing* or *escaping* – turning *from* the world
- *Pursuing* or *participating* – turning *to* God

Again we see this pattern – of a turning *from* and a turning *to* – in Paul’s letter to the Romans.

Read again Romans 6:11

This repetition of reading a verse from God’s Word many times is highly beneficial to your study of God’s Word. You will see us do this frequently throughout the Biblical Studies Course. This repetition does three things:

- It reinforces the truth of God’s Word
- It assists in the memorization of God’s Word
- It helps build patterns of recognition in God’s Word

And one of the patterns that emerges clearly from these three scriptures – **1 Timothy 6:11**, **2 Peter 1:4** and **Romans 6:11** – is the pattern of repentance. In **Romans 6:11**, we are not just to count ourselves dead to sin (or dead to the world), we are also to count ourselves alive to God!

Now we’re ready to read the context of Paul’s charge to Timothy.

A Charge to the Christian

Read 1 Timothy 6:11-14

After telling Timothy to “flee all this” and “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness,” Paul goes on to instruct Timothy *how* he is to do this. And Paul’s instruction can be summarized in two statements:

- Make the good confession (**verses 12-13**)
- Fight the good fight (**verse 12**)

These two actions are an expression of genuine repentance and a lifestyle aligned away from the world and to the Lord. Let’s examine both these actions.

Make the Good Confession

Read again 1 Timothy 6:12-13

What was the good confession that Timothy made “in the presence of many witnesses”? We could easily put forward some good candidates. Maybe it was a confession of Jesus as Savior (after all, this is usually the confession required of a covert today). On the other hand, maybe it was a confession of eternal life, or that salvation comes only by grace. The list of possibilities is very long.

One of the best candidates would be found in **Romans 10:9**:

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Is this the “good confession” that Paul is talking to Timothy about? If there were no other clues in Paul’s letter to Timothy, we might settle on this declaration of the Lordship of Jesus as the “good confession” and, at least in part, we would be right.

But let’s take a closer look at what Paul is writing to Timothy. The clue to what Paul is meaning by the expression “good confession” can be found in the context of Paul’s charge to Timothy. In **verse 13**, Paul writes:

“In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate *made the good confession*, I charge you to keep this command...”

Paul is stating that the good confession that Timothy made is the *same* good confession that Christ Jesus made before Pontius Pilate! So what was the good confession that Jesus made?

Read John 18:36

The confession that Jesus made before Pilate was:

“My kingdom *is not of this world*...But now my kingdom is from another place.”

The good confession that Jesus made, and that every believer in Christ is also to make, is this:

“I am *in* this world, but I am not *of* this world.”

This is both the revelation of the Gospel *and* the repentance it inspires. Note that Paul charges Timothy with two instructions related to this “good confession” he had made:

Take hold of the eternal life

Paul writes:

“*Take hold of the eternal life* to which you were called when you made your good confession...”

Timothy already had eternal life. He had possessed eternal life ever since he made his good confession.* But now Paul says *take hold* of that eternal life. Eternal life is not just a state reserved for the future; it is something you take hold of now!

Read Philippians 3:12

When you turn from the world and turn to God, you “take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of [you].” This is what you are called to pursue (**1 Timothy 6:11**) and partake of (**2 Peter 1:4**).

I charge you to keep this command

Paul writes:

“In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus...who made the good confession, *I charge you to keep this command.*”

What was the command that Paul was charging Timothy with “in the sight of Christ Jesus...who made the good confession”? It was the command of **verse 11**:

“But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.”

Read Philippians 3:13-14

Do you notice in these two verses the same pattern of repentance repeating itself? Paul encourages the Philippian Christians to “live according to the pattern we gave you” by joining “with others in following my example” (**Philippians 3:17**). And what is that example?

- “*Forgetting what is behind*” – This is the first part of repentance: Turning *away from* sin, the world and self, escaping the corruption in the world, fleeing from the effects of the old self, counting yourself dead to sin, putting off the old self.
- “*Straining toward what is ahead*” – This is the second part of repentance: Turning *to* the Lord, pursuing his glory and goodness, participating in the

* Note that the confession that Jesus is Lord (**Romans 10:9**) and the confession that the believer does not belong to this world (**1 Timothy 6:12**) appear to have been confessed at the same time – at the point of conversion to Christ. Because Paul links this “good confession” with Timothy’s receiving of eternal life, it would appear that this was part of the public acknowledgement of faith so vital to salvation in the first century Church.

divine nature, counting yourself alive to God, putting on the new self.

In **verse 14**, Paul describes in greater detail *how* he is “straining toward what is ahead” and also how *Timothy* is to pursue “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.” He says:

“I *press on toward the goal* to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

What was the goal that Paul was pressing on toward? What was the prize for which God had called him? We can know for certain it is *not* eternal life, for this is something that Paul and Timothy already had. Eternal life is a free gift, not a prize. So what was the prize?

Read Philippians 3:8-10

The context of Paul’s declaration gives us his meaning. The prize toward which God had called Paul and Timothy heavenward was *to know Christ!* This is the reason why you turn your back on the world. This is the thing you pursue with abandon. The knowledge of God, in its ever-increasing depth and expression, is the prize which outshines all that this world can offer.

Fight the Good Fight

Not only are we called to make the good confession, we are also called to fight the good fight.

Read Ephesians 6:10-12

In this passage, Paul describes “spiritual forces of evil,” demonic spirits which fortress themselves in the system of this world, energizing what **1 Corinthians 2:12** calls “the spirit of this world.” Satan is called “the god of this age” (**2 Corinthians 4:4**) and “the prince of this world” (**John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11**).

As a Christian who has made the good confession, you are now called to “take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (**verse 11**) and “after you have done everything, to stand” (**verse 13**).

This is the first level of the good fight – your stand against the “powers of this dark world.” The second level of the good fight, however, is not against the powers of darkness fortified *in the world*, but against the powers of darkness that have fortified themselves *within the Church*.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:2-6

Here Paul talks of “strongholds” which he describes as “arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.” But he is not talking about enemy strongholds in the world. He is talking about enemy strongholds within the Church.*

* Note that it is the responsibility of church leadership to demolish strongholds within a church. But even if you are not in a position of leadership, you too can fight this good fight by getting behind your leaders in *their* good fight.

This demolishing of wrong teaching, wrong thinking and wrong practice within the Church – which are like strongholds which harbor enemy activity – is targeted by weapons “with divine power to demolish strongholds” (**verse 4**). The principal divine weapon is the Gospel itself – the Word of God piercing the sinful condition of man with God’s saving power (note also **Hebrews 4:12**).

The Picture of a Race

These two actions – making the good confession and fighting the good fight – are combined in one picture used throughout the New Testament – the picture of an athlete running in a race.

Read Hebrews 12:1-2

Do you notice again the pattern of repentance emerging from these verses? We see that as runners in a world-defying, history-spanning relay race, we are to do two things:

- *Throw off* everything that hinders (read **Galatians 5:7**)
- *Run the race* marked out for us (read **1 Corinthians 9:24**)

Paul continually uses the analogy of an athletic race to depict the believer’s relation to the world.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:25-27

Paul here speaks about the strict discipline endured by athletes who have their eye on the gold medal. In the same way, it is your desire for the prize – the increasing depths of the knowledge of God – which causes you to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” and to run the race marked out for you.

Using two pictures drawn from the Greek olympic games of his day, Paul describes how he keeps on track to win the prize:

- *Running* – He doesn’t run aimlessly. He keeps his eye firmly fixed on the finishing line.
- *Boxing* – He doesn’t just beat the air. He “beats” his body to keep it in subjection to the Cross. Whenever a fleshy desire raises its head, he “boxes” it back into place.

The reason such strict discipline is needed is because of the two principal lures that will seek to distract you from winning the prize:

- The lure of the world’s glory
- The lure of fleshly desires

Notice that Paul speaks of winning “a crown that will last forever” compared the natural athlete’s goal of winning “a crown that will not last” (see also **2 Timothy 2:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 2:10; 3:11**).

In the ancient world of olympic competition, the winner of a race received a laurel wreath which faded and withered over time. Paul is here comparing the fading glory of the world with the eternal glory that comes in knowing Christ.

Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8

At the end of his life, Paul was able to declare that he had completed the course set out for him. He had faced the world, with all its temptations and all its attractions, and was able to count it all as “rubbish” for the sake of knowing Christ (**Philippians 3:7-10**).

The Issue of Focus

Read again Hebrews 12:2

The focus of your life is very important. The Gospel was specifically designed to change your focus from yourself to God.

Read Romans 8:5-7

Paul here speaks about two kinds of focus:

Focus on the flesh

The flesh is the Bible’s catchphrase for a self-centered way of thinking and living. If the focus of your mind is on yourself – either in self-gratification and in self-effort – then the result will be a life not pleasing to God.

Focus on the Spirit

The central focus of the Christian life is designed to be the Lord himself. This is the focus that the Gospel continually brings you back to. The secret to living a Christian life that has overcome sin and the world is not “trying harder” yourself. It is switching your focus from sin and from the world to Christ!

This is the essence of the pattern of repentance we’ve been studying in this lesson. By turning from the world and turning to God, your eye switches focus. As long as you are staring face-to-face with the corruption of this world, you will be entangled in that corruption, no matter how much you may want to live for God. But by *repenting* – turning from the world and to God – your focus becomes the Lord himself. He becomes the prize of your life. He becomes the goal of everything.

As J. B. Phillips translates **Hebrews 12:1-2**:

“...let us run the race that we have to run with patience, our eyes fixed on Jesus, the source and the goal of our faith.”

Where is your focus? If you haven’t yet had a revelation of the finished work of the Cross, your focus will always be on yourself, trying to do what God has already done for you. But if you have caught a glimpse of the glorious revelation of

the Gospel – that God has taken the work of salvation totally out of your court – then your focus can shift from yourself to the Lord.

Our encouragement to you is simple: Press into him. Press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of you. Pursue the Lord with everything within you. As you do, you will find that the corruption of the world becomes a non-issue. You have been taken out of the world. Now you are ready to be sent by the Lord back into the world as an ambassador of his kingdom and a herald of the victory already won!

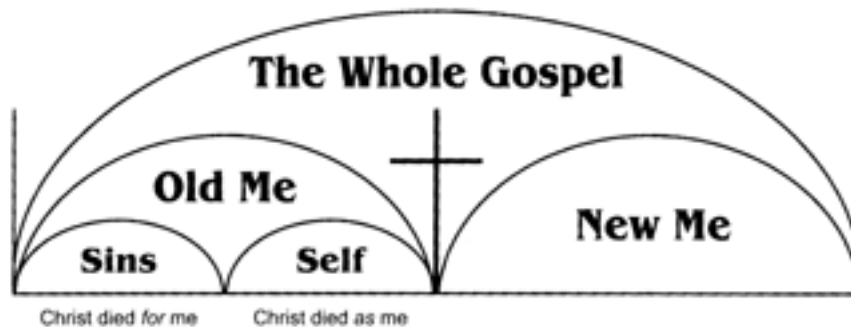
Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-20

In Summary

Over the last ten lessons we have explored the first two fourths of the Gospel:

- The first quarter of the Gospel – the part that deals with your *sins*
- The second quarter of the Gospel – the part that deals with your *self*

These two quarters make up the first half of the Gospel, which is focused on God's solution to the **Old Me** through the *death* and *burial* of Christ.



Now that the foundation of the first half of the Gospel is properly laid, we are ready to move on to the next half of the Gospel, the section which deals with God's provision for the **New Me** through the *resurrection* and *ascension* of Christ.

Read Colossians 3:1-3