

WORLDLINESS

What Is It?

Is it makeup? Driving around in a bright red sports car? Wearing expensive jewelry or the latest fashions hot off the Paris runways? Is it drinking alcohol, dancing or going to parties? Should a Christian avoid any—or all—of these? Should he try not to fit in with the crowd? What does the Bible say?

JUST WHAT IS the Bible definition of worldliness? Must a follower of Jesus Christ completely isolate himself from the world, and everything in it, in order to avoid being worldly? Must Christians be odd, weird or completely “out of step” with the world? Do they need to sound and look “religious” in order to avoid worldliness?

What about material possessions or wealth? After all, doesn’t the Bible say, “Has not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith” (James 2:5)? Can a Christian be wealthy, drive a new car or own the best things, yet not be caught up in the things of this world?

All men have their own opinions on what worldliness is, but God’s view is the only one that matters.

So what does the Bible say?

God Wants Us to Prosper

God intends that we have an abundant life. Christ said to His disciples, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). The Apostle John wrote, “Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health” (III John 2). In Proverbs 12, Solomon wrote, “the substance [material wealth] of a diligent man is precious.” He also instructed, “whatsoever the hand finds to do, do it with all your might” (Ecc. 9:10).

So, if a Christian works faithfully, using God-given talents and abilities, it is God’s will that he be blessed and prosper. A follower of Christ can have a full, abundant and happy life.

The problem occurs when a person sets his heart on gaining material wealth, when everything he does and thinks about revolves around getting. He gets caught up in this world’s ways—the way of “get”—and lives contrary to God’s way of life—the way of “give.” He simply has no desire to accept, obey or pursue God’s truth.

God does call into His Church the “poor of the world” because they are not consumed by materialism. Having less abundance to cloud their thinking, they will be more willing to accept spiritual truths. And they won’t have as many material possessions that they *may* have to lose or give up in order to obey God.

God intends that His children consider material possessions properly, to use them wisely, for the good of others as well as themselves.



Physical Pleasures—Sinful?

Let's examine whether or not physical pleasures are sinful. Many people use the following verse to condemn all pleasures of the flesh: "Love not the world, nor 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, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:15-16).

God created the five senses—sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing—so that we could experience, enjoy, and take pleasure in physical things. No particular physical thing of itself represents worldliness—but lusting after that thing is wrong. Lust is an illicit and sinful desire. It can make us desire or use something in a manner contrary to God's law or the purpose for which He created it. Lust represents a wrong attitude of the mind and heart.

Sex, alcohol, dancing, card playing and watching television and movies are examples of activities that can produce certain pleasure. These are not wrong when used within the confines of God's Law.

God created sex and called it good (Gen. 1:27, 31). He commanded man and woman to use it in a right and proper way (vs. 28). Yet, fornication, adultery, and other wrong uses of sex violate God's law and are forbidden (Ex. 20:14; Gal. 5:19; I Cor. 6:18).

Christ turned water into wine at a wedding (John 2:1-11), showing that He approved the proper use of alcohol. As the "Lord" of the Old Testament (I Cor. 10:1-4), He inspired Solomon to write, "A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry" (Ecc. 10:19). But drunkenness is condemned by God in I Corinthians 6:10: "[Neither] thieves, nor covetous, *nor drunkards*, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God."

God's people often danced in times of celebration. Notice: "And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistines, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music" (I Sam. 18:6).

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When the Ark of the Covenant was returned to Israel, David, a man after God's own heart, "danced before the Lord with all his might" (II Sam. 6:14). His son Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 3:4, "there is a time for dancing."

Further, the saints are to praise God "in the dance" (Psa. 149:3). Clearly, dancing is not wrong. But when done in a sexually suggestive or lewd manner, it violates God's law and is a sin. Sin is the transgression—breaking—of the law (I John 3:4).

The same principle applies to card playing, television, and movies. Ask yourself: Are the television shows I watch wholesome and uplifting? Or are they full of countless acts of adultery, fornication, drunkenness, rebellion, violence and filthy language? These kinds of programs and movies depict an ungodly way of life and are clearly worldly.

Understand. Most card playing is permissible, but not if it involves gambling, drinking games or anything involving personal stakes or lewd behavior. Gambling is driven by lust and greed.

Do you find yourself desiring to watch, and fill your time with, endless television shows? Do you "have" to see almost every movie that comes out, in order to seek physical pleasures or escape life? If so, you are caught up in the world, caught up in "the lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes."

You cannot live your life through television and cinema, which glorify

killing, stealing, gambling, seducing and drinking to excess! It will affect your character and produce a worldly attitude.

Our Physical Appearance

What about the way you dress? Does it matter?

The way of a Christian is moderation. Paul instructed the Church at Philippi to "Let your MODERATION be known unto all men" (Phil. 4:5). Very few today practice moderation in much of anything. Hairstyles, makeup, fashion, tattoos and body piercings get more outlandish and provocative every day. Everyone seems to want to outdo everyone else. People follow the "crowd," living according to the course of this world, set forth by Satan the devil (Eph. 2:2).

By contrast, Christians must be modest and chaste in their dress. Their appearance should never be shocking or suggestive (I Tim. 2:8-10). Remember, God created mankind in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). He is reproducing Himself in human beings. The body of a converted person is the temple of God, a dwelling place for His Holy Spirit. God does not take it lightly when anyone—Christian or not—defiles his body with piercings or tattoos. Read Leviticus 19:28: "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks [New King James: "tattoos"] upon you: I am the LORD."

Anyone who does such things clearly abuses his body, which was created by God. God called what He created good. It is impossible for mankind to improve on anything that God created—this includes using makeup.

Called Out of This World

Should a Christian try to fit in with the world? What about joining clubs or lodges, or being involved in social activities?

Anyone seeking to serve God cannot spend time at worldly social gatherings or join this world's clubs or lodges. A true follower of Christ must not try to fit in—to be like the people of this world. He cannot seek to dress and act like they do. The apostle Peter exhorted, "...no longer...live the rest of [your] time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the

time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (I Pet. 4:2-4). The world does run to excess—and people will think you are strange when you refuse to join them.

A Christian cannot love the world—its societies and systems of men. This world is not of God. He calls it evil in Galatians 1:4. This present world is based on the satanic, "get" way of life—competition, greed, selfishness and vanity. It is easy and natural to become swept up in it. But loving and being "cozy" with society actually makes one an enemy of God (Jms. 4:4). Christians are called out from the world. They must separate themselves from society (II Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4).

Worldliness Is Sin

Now, what exactly is worldliness? Before defining it, let's examine its fruits.

Take a hard look at the world around you. Search your local newspaper. Visit the magazine section of any large bookstore. Scan through television channels. The modern age is filled with flashing, sparkling eye candy of multiple cultures and subcultures that compete for your attention.

Society is drowning in mobile phones, pagers, handheld computers, e-mails—possessed by people who "have" to be instantly and continuously linked to each other because they're afraid of being "out of the loop."

Wanting to rebel against mainstream society, some hide behind "character" outfits. Today, middle and upper class teens often dress as though they are hardcore urban street thugs trapped in an endless cycle of poverty, violence and hopelessness.

Some who are "depressed" about growing up in a two-parent, middle class family dress up in "Goth" styles, wearing black and white makeup and black lipstick to prove to the world how "serious" they take life. Others fill their lives with raves and after-hours parties, and pour a virtual pharmacy of drugs into their systems. They live to get high,

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refusing to face the sober realities of life.

Go to an independent music store and you will see another sub-culture of worldliness: youth full of pride and vanity, yet clean in their own eyes (Prov. 30:12). With hairstyles resembling everything from spikes to lions' manes to unkempt, unwashed and undesirable, today's teens and twenty-somethings scrounge for the latest "underground record." They idolize whatever is the latest band to unleash crashing and wailing, falsely called music. Such songs could be rock, rap or jazz—to a young person it does not matter, as long as his peers approve.

Observe any music award television show. Notice how so many in the audience wear tight-fitting, virtually painted-on outfits that are flashy and attention-getting, revealing parts of the body that were meant to be concealed. Many now look like aliens from outer space.

Notice the way people walk, especially in the inner cities. Full of brashness and bravado, they stroll as if to say, "Don't mess with me."

Listen to how people speak. Even those with Master's degrees curse and use slang words as though they only have third-grade educations. So many love to copy those who cannot form a complete sentence without cursing or using God's name in vain.

And there are those who swing to the other extreme. They avoid using common, everyday words and deliberately use more scholarly words that appeal to intellectual vanity, yet offer very little in substance. Such people seem to be in love with their own minds. Using the language of academia is their way of getting respect from their like-minded peers.

But King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, said, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity...I communed with my own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yes, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow" (Ecc. 1:1, 16-18). Of course, accumulating important knowledge is certainly not wrong.

Notice the world of mainstream entertainment and media. It's about what's hot, what's new, what's next, the latest—the latest movie blockbuster or sitcom. Today, entertainment is about "how far can we go?" in pushing (or blurring) the boundaries of decency and good taste. More extra-marital sex, more violence, less morality, more blurring the lines between good and evil, promoting situational ethics instead of choosing right over wrong.

Many, desperate to show how sophisticated their tastes are, embrace the world of independent films—a sub-culture of sickness and depravity passing itself off as intellectually uplifting.

On college campuses and high school and middle school hallways, the air is charged with sexual tension, mixed with peer pressure and bad judgment. Using a "band-aid" approach, adults turn a blind eye to the misadventures of the next generation, which is sexually active, jaded and always ready to move on to something new. Sadly, many are in awe of homosexuality and lesbianism, thinking it is "cool," and decide to experiment.

For increasing numbers, life is centered around weekends filled with extreme sports: mountain climbing,

para-sailing, skateboarding, mountain biking, and so forth. Their world is about getting that next “rush.” Without it, they seem to not feel alive.

And then there are those who love to read whatever the intellectual world deems as “hot.” They love reading the writings of authors who they view as wise—yet they reject the Author of true knowledge. They ignore His book, the Bible, which is the world’s best-seller—while at the same time, it is the least understood.

Other readers go to the opposite extreme, filling their lives with underground “zines” and obscene independent comic books and graphic novels, which would have been stamped “x-rated” twenty years ago.

What is underground and cutting edge today—music, dance, books, plays—inevitably becomes mainstream tomorrow. This will drive the underground scene to be even more extreme...which will eventually become mainstream. And so the cycle continues, until this world becomes completely like the last days of Noah and of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:26-30). That time is soon.

Again, what is worldliness? What does it *mean* to be worldly? Worldliness is anything that violates—transgresses—God’s perfect and Holy Law of love (Rom. 13:10). Anything contrary to His way—found in His Word—is

the way of this world. This includes our actions and thoughts. God’s Law is spiritual (Rom. 7:14). This Law covers all aspects of life.

When Jesus Christ was on earth as flesh and blood, He was tempted by the things of this world like any other man. But He overcame the world (John 16:33). He expects His servants, Christians, to follow His example (I Pet. 2:21).

God inspired John to write, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (I John 5:19). In fact, the whole world *is* deceived by Satan the devil (Rev. 12:9). As the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2), Satan broadcasts his worldly attitudes of lust, greed, envy, pride and vanity.

Paul pointed out to the Corinthian Christians that, though we are physically in the world, we must come spiritually out of the world (I Cor. 5:9-11).

One of the leading magazines today is called “Cosmopolitan,” sometimes nick-named “Cosmo.” This name makes a clear statement—that its articles, advertisements, photos and readership are of this world.

But when Christ and Paul taught about overcoming the world, they used the Greek word *kosmos*, which is where “cosmopolitan” comes from. Being cosmopolitan is not an option for God’s servants!

Avoid Worldliness

In John 15:19, Christ told His disciples, “If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

Christians are not—cannot be—of this world, even though they must live in it. God commands His people to not only “come out of her [the ways of this world], My people, that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4), but also not to look back, longing for what we left behind. Christ instructed, in Luke 17:32, “Remember Lot’s wife.” This woman merely looked back at Sodom and Gomorrah and became a pillar of salt as a result. The point is that she longed for a way of life that she had been taken out of.

If you are truly avoiding worldliness, then you are dedicating yourself to God and His way of life. You are living your life “by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). You are letting God’s Word direct and guide every thought and every activity in which you engage. You are building godly character, practicing balance and moderation in everything you think and do.

If you do these things, and avoid worldliness, you will have a happy, balanced and abundant life! □

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