

#247 "In the World But Not Of the World"

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We must be wise and discerning when understanding strategically how to engage the lost without getting corrupted by the world. But engage the lost with the truth of Jesus Christ we must, and two passages in particular provide a very clear roadmap for us of how we can and should do this. The first is found in John 17 in Jesus' prayer for His disciples, including the twelve and all who would come after them, including us. John 17:14-18 says,

"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."

From Jesus' prayer, we see that we need the Word of God in order to remain sanctified in a dark world. We must hold to the truth at all costs and not compromise in any way concerning the gospel. We see that the world hates us because it hated Him. They don't want to smell the aroma of life because it reminds them of their own aroma of death. But for others, it will point them to life and open the door for the gospel (2 Corinthians 2:15-16). In general, though, Christians will be hated because the world hates truth and loves darkness (John 3:19). As Christians, our home is heaven, and thus we are not of the world (Philippians 3:20). We do not belong to the world system, that which is ruled by the prince of the power of the air, Satan himself (Ephesians 2:2). Yet Jesus didn't pray that we would be taken out of this battleground, but rather He prayed that we would persevere in holiness and in our mission and calling. In fact, just as God sent Jesus into the world to establish His kingdom of heaven, we, too, are sent by Christ into the world to continue preaching concerning the kingdom of heaven (Acts 1:8). We are light in darkness and salt amidst decay and rot. But our city on a hill is not for fencing unbelievers out, but it is for boldly pointing out a different way, the only saving way (Matthew 5:13-16). Being in the world yet not of it as Jesus prayed does not mean being part of the world system by engaging in its evil ways. It means that we are sent out on a mission to battle for souls on the foreign soil of the devil. We are strangers in this place, and it is our calling to point people to the truth.

Jesus Himself demonstrated this being in the world yet not of it in Matthew 9:9-13, which says,

"As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, 'Follow Me!' And he got up and followed Him. Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, 'Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?' But when Jesus heard this, He said, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this

means: "I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE," for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus was fulfilling His mission by calling disciples to Himself to teach them the mystery of the gospel and to establish His church. He visited Matthew at his collection booth, a place where evil and corruption probably took place but not a place where Jesus would defile Himself. He engaged the lost man Matthew on his turf, and Matthew invited Jesus to his home for a reception where his friends and associates could be introduced to Him (Mark 2:14-17, Luke 5:27-32). Jesus didn't go to a corrupt venue as if He was sanctioning an evil enterprise or immoral activities, but He simply shared a common bond of humanity- food, drink, and conversation. Many other tax collectors and "sinners" (could be adulterers, prostitutes, drunkards, thieves, liars, or any other category that represents a cross-section of sinful humanity) came and sat down with Jesus and Matthew. Jesus didn't close His eyes, run for cover, and escape their spiritual stench. Rather, He continued to eat with them and talk with them. He didn't laugh at crude jokes with them or curse the authorities of the day with them. He didn't buy them a round of beers and encourage them to drown their sorrows. No, He did what Jesus did, call sinners to repent and teach them of God's love. He knew they needed a spiritual doctor, and it was His mission to go to the sick and not the healthy, to the sinner and not the righteous. This was evidence of His compassion for the lost. Praise God that He didn't give us all over to being hopelessly lost in sin, but rather He sent Jesus to us to teach us the way to heaven and to provide the open door through His sacrifice on the cross! How dare we gloat in sinners dying in their sin and refuse to speak truth to them for fear of getting tainted or rejected. Jesus knew that the masses would eventually turn against Him, probably even some that He had dined with that day. But still He loved them and spoke to them the truth, even though most remained hateful toward Him. He didn't abandon the world; instead, He went to it with the gospel. May God increase our sense of compassion in our hearts toward the lost, because, even though they may hate us or mock us, they need what we have to share.

Colossians 4:5-6 says, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person." Wisdom is required when we interact with the lost, and we should pray for this in faith believing that God will grant it (James 1:5). We should pray for such God-given opportunities, and when they occur, our words should be gracious, seasoned with salt rather than tainted with hate or judgmentalism. Gracious speech has a way of enabling people to open up so a meaningful dialogue can occur, whereas harsh, judgmental speech creates a spirit of antagonism (Proverbs 15:1). The unsaved often assume they will be hated and immediately condemned, and Christians must be willing to love them yet show them how much God hates their sin.

There will be a day in heaven to sit back and relax in our eternal safe haven, but for now we have work to do. Let us do it wisely and in holiness as Jesus did, following His example of being full of grace and truth (John 1:14).