

Fighting
Spiritual
Battles

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FIGHTING SPIRITUAL BATTLES

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Introduction

Pease in our times!” This was the guarantee that Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain secured from Hitler and proclaimed to Britain in 1938. The Allies agreed to allow Hitler to annex part of Czechoslovakia thinking that it would satisfy him. Less than a year later World War II broke out with the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. In trying to appease Nazi Germany, Chamberlain and the Allies severely underestimated their enemy.

Christians face three real and potent enemies: the world, the Devil, and the flesh. Ephesians 2:1–3 refers to all three of these spiritual enemies: “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this *world*, according to the *prince of the power of the air*, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our *flesh*, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (emphasis added). While this passage is explaining the condition of people before their salvation, the Bible is clear that these enemies continue to wage war on believers. The battle is real. No one wants to go to war. If given a choice, who wouldn’t choose peace? Yet, the Christian’s enemies cannot be appeased.

How do we battle our spiritual enemies? The purpose of these Bible studies is to help believers in their conflict with the world, the Devil, and the flesh. Two lessons are dedicated to each enemy. Lessons 1, 3, and 5 summarize what the

Bible teaches about each enemy and how they attack God's people. Lessons 2, 4, and 6 lay out the Biblical strategies Christians should employ in spiritual warfare. God never intended His people to live spiritually defeated lives. Victory is possible when we follow God's battle plan.



Lesson 1

The Danger of Worldliness

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”
—1 John 2:15

God calls believers to live holy lives that are distinct and sanctified from the world. Yet, all too often, believers succumb to the worldliness of their culture. This is the growing trend in the U.S.A. Pastor R. Kent Hughes correctly observes that “[the contemporary evangelical church] is lacking in its ability to remain uncontaminated by the unchristian thinking and morality of contemporary culture.”¹ In this lesson we will discover what worldliness means and expose its danger for Christians.

Understanding Our Enemy: the World

At the outset of creation, God created a perfect world that was altogether good. Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with their Creator in the Garden of Eden. But this perfect world radically changed when

they disobeyed God and sinned. Since the Fall (Adam and Eve's first sin), every person is born into sin and is alienated from God. Indwelling sin corrupts people's thoughts, affections, and actions (Ephesians 4:17–19). The Bible clearly teaches that natural man is an enemy with God (Romans 5:10).

1. Read Ephesians 2:1–3. How does this passage describe natural man?

The most common Greek term for "world" is kosmos (used 186 times in the New Testament). It generally refers to something well arranged or ordered. In different contexts it refers to the ordered universe, the earth, or humanity. When used in reference to the moral world, it means "mankind as alienated from God, unredeemed and hostile to him."²

Grasping the scope and severity of humanity's fallen state is foundational in understanding our enemy the world. Simply put, "the world" is fallen humanity in organized rebellion against its Creator. The world is a system that is hostile to God and the Bible. In addition, the Bible often associates this age with the world's hostility toward God. Satan, as the ruler of this age, exerts control, power, and influence in the world (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19).

Worldliness against God shows up in a society's culture. While culture is not sinful in and of itself, every culture has worldly elements. David Wells asserts that worldliness is what any particular culture does "which makes sin look normal and righteousness look strange."³ Unbiblical philosophies, sinful lifestyles, and ungodly movements abound in all cultures.

2. What examples of worldliness do you see in today's culture?

The New Testament regularly contrasts this present evil age with the coming age of God's rule. (See, for instance, Ephesians 1:21; Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30.)

The Peril of Worldliness for Believers

The Scriptures warn repeatedly of the danger of worldliness for the believer. If the world is organized rebellion against God, then worldliness for believers may be described as a Christian somehow getting caught up and participating in that rebellion. First John 2:15 states, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." From this verse we learn that worldliness is first and foremost a matter of the heart. God demands the believer's loyalty and love. When a believer loves this world or the things in this world, then his heart is divided and he cannot really love God. A divided love cannot be a devoted love.

Marriage is a perfect illustration of this principle. A husband cannot love another woman and hope to have a solid marriage. When he comes home and says to his wife, "Honey, I love you," his words ring hollow.

Just as marriage demands a faithful heart, so the believer's relationship with the Lord demands faithfulness.

James 4:4 makes a similar point: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Could God put it any more clearly? When a believer befriends God's enemy, the believer becomes God's enemy. Friendship with the world means hostility toward God. Notice also that James likened such disloyalty to God to committing adultery. He used this metaphor to shock and warn his readers of the dangers of worldliness.

Romans 12:2 brings out another perspective: "And be not conformed to this world: 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." Paul warned believers not to be conformed or molded to this present age. This warning shows that it is possible for believers to pattern their thinking and lifestyle according to the world.

3. Reread 1 John 2:15, James 4:4, and Romans 12:2. Formulate your own definition of worldliness.

The Greek word for "world" in Romans 12:2 is aiōn and refers to this present evil age dominated by Satan (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4; Galatians 1:4; 2 Timothy 4:10; Titus 2:12).

The Lure of Worldliness

First John 2:16 explains how the world lures believers toward worldliness: “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.” John outlined for us three specific ways the world appeals to people. First, the world lures people with the *lust of the flesh*. “Flesh” in this context most likely refers to one’s body, not the sin nature. Therefore, the lust of the flesh is a reference to physical pleasure. Sins such as sexual immorality, drug and alcohol abuse, and gluttony are examples of the lust of the flesh.

The second lure John mentioned is the *lust of the eyes*. Essentially this refers to covetousness. When someone sees something that does not belong to him or something that exceeds his needs and then greedily desires it, he is guilty of covetousness. In the Ten Commandments God forbade the Israelites from coveting such things as their neighbors’ houses, spouses, livestock, or belongings (Exodus 20:17).

4. Read 1 Timothy 6:6–10. What is the relationship between the lust of the eyes and the love of money (v. 10)?

There are three main Greek words for "life" in the New Testament. In 1 John 2:16 the Greek word translated "life" is bios, used just ten times in the New Testament. It always refers to one's earthly existence or worldly possessions.⁴

The *pride of life* is the third way that the world tempts individuals away from God. The word "life" in 1 John 2:16 almost certainly refers to one's material wealth, as it does in 1 John 3:17. There it is translated as the world's "good." Thus the pride of life means the promotion of an arrogance or overconfidence in one's possessions and achievements as opposed to dependence upon God. "The focus is on people who operate purely on a human level and have no spiritual dimension to their existence. This is the person who loves the world, whose affections are all centered on the world, who has no love for God or spiritual things ('the love of the Father is not in him,' 1 John 2:15)."⁵

5. Many theologians link 1 John 2:16 to Satan's temptations of Eve and of Jesus. Identify their temptations with the three lures of the world.

1 John 2:16	Eve (Genesis 3:6)	Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11)
The Lust of the Flesh		
The Lust of the Eyes		
The Pride of Life		

One more important point should be made. These three lures help us understand that worldliness often corrupts and perverts the good gifts of God. Sex is not evil. It is a gift of God to be enjoyed within the context of marriage. But the world perverts God's gift of sex into pornography, adultery, and fornication. Money is not evil; but the love of money leads to all sorts of evil. Gluttony perverts God purpose for life-sustaining nourishment. Owning nice things and accumulating wealth are not wrong. But when people take pride in their possessions and fail to depend upon God, they then become worldly.

6. What are some areas in which you might be tempted toward worldliness?

Worldliness and Righteous Lot

Lot is an enigmatic figure in Scripture. Little in the Old Testament commends him. Yet in 2 Peter 2:7 and 8 we find out that he was a true believer. Peter used the adjective "righteous" (or "just") three times to describe Lot. This assessment of Lot confirms what Abraham's prayer in Genesis 18:23–33 only suggested, that Lot was indeed righteous. The reason this is a bit of a mystery is because of

Some commentators argue that Abraham prayed for the deliverance of ten righteous souls because there were presumably ten members in Lot's family.

what the rest of the Old Testament records about Lot.

Lot was Abraham's nephew. He traveled with Abraham from Ur to Canaan and dwelt with Abraham's household. When their flocks grew too large to occupy the same land, Lot separated from his uncle. When Abraham gave Lot his choice of land, Lot elected to move away from Canaan to the city of Sodom despite the fact that "the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (Genesis 13:13).

7. Read Genesis 13:10. Why did Lot choose to move to Sodom?

The draw and appeal of the world is great. (Remember 1 John 2:16?) The possibility exists that Lot was not motivated by sheer greed. He might have rationalized that living among the cities of the plain was simply a wise business move. But as Genesis 19 reveals, this decision cost Lot nearly everything.

The Lord revealed to Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness (Genesis 18:20, 21). Later that evening, two angels went to Sodom to warn Lot and his family of the imminent doom (Genesis 19:1). After the men of the town attempted to sexually attack Lot's

guests, the messengers urgently pled with Lot to gather his family and leave the area.

The next few events are astonishing (Genesis 19:14–26). First, Lot’s sons-in-law laughed at Lot’s warning and refused to leave. Next, Lot himself hesitated to leave Sodom; the angels actually had to grab Lot’s hand and physically escort Lot, his wife, and two of their daughters from the city. Finally, while Sodom was aflame in judgment, Lot’s wife disobeyed the angel’s instructions not to look back, and she was tragically turned into a pillar of salt.

8. Why do you think that Lot hesitated to leave and that Lot’s wife looked back at Sodom?

Interestingly, 2 Peter 2:7 and 8 state that Lot was oppressed and tormented by the wickedness he saw and heard in Sodom. Though he never participated in the Sodomites’ wickedness, he still embraced the city. R. Kent Hughes comments, “Ironically, though Lot was revolted by Sodom, Sodom was in his soul. It is possible, then, for a believer to be distressed by the world while willfully clinging to the world.”⁶

How does Lot’s decision to move to

Could it be that Lot's daughters were influenced by the worldliness of the Sodomites?

Sodom look now? Consider what worldliness cost him. First, he lost his *fortune*. Fire and brimstone destroyed all his earthly wealth and possessions. Second, he lost his *family*. He lost family members who stayed in Sodom; his wife also lost her life. Later, his two remaining daughters deceived Lot and had sexual relations with him. In a way, he lost them as well. Finally, Lot lost his *fame*. His daughters' sons became the fathers of two nations: Ammon and Moab. Both of these nations eventually became the enemies of Israel and faced divine judgment.

9. Read 1 John 2:17. How does this verse apply to what happened to Lot?

For Further Study

1. Worldliness is a real danger for church ministries. Consider these words from Mark Dever on cultural relevance in ministry: "The culture to which we would conform in order to be relevant becomes so inextricably entwined with antagonism to the Gospel that to conform to it must mean a loss of the Gospel itself."⁷ Where do you see worldliness creeping into churches today?

2. How might worldliness affect a church's philosophy, methodology, and ministries?
3. Lot's stay in Sodom greatly impacted his life and family. How do you think the world impacts you in the following areas?
 - Your thinking
 - Your values
 - Your priorities
 - Your family

Notes

1. R. Kent Hughes, *Set Apart: Calling a Worldly Church to a Godly Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 10.
2. Timothy and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (1994, 2000).
3. David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 4.
4. J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988).
5. The *NET Bible Notes, Version 1.0* (Biblical Studies Foundation, 2004, 2005).
6. Hughes, 13.
7. Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 28.