

How can we live in this world but not be of this world?

Adapted from: "Biblical Paradoxes: In the World, But Not of the World." Based on a lesson by Ethan Longhenry

<http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVsermons/InTheWorldButNotOfTheWorld.htm>

Text: [John 17:6-16](#)

An ancient story tells that after Jesus had ascended back to Heaven. He is met by the angel Gabriel who asks him, "**Now that your work is finished, what plans have you made to insure that the truth you brought to earth will spread throughout the world?**"

Jesus answered, "I called some fishermen and tax-collectors to walk along with me as I did my Father's will."

"Yes, I know about them," said Gabriel, "but what other plans have you made? "

Jesus replied, "I taught Peter, James and John about the kingdom of God; I taught Thomas about faith; and all of them were with me as I healed and preached to the multitudes."

Gabriel began to lose patience. "Really now, all this is well and good, but surely you must have other plans to make sure your work was not in vain."

Jesus fixed Gabriel with a steady gaze and said with finality, "I have no other plans. I am depending on them!! "

Jesus was – and still is - depending on his disciples, to spread his message of love, mercy, and compassion to all the world. As he said in his final command: " Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus was depending – and still is - on his disciples, but he also promised not leave them alone. He promised them a helper, the Spirit of his own person, to accompany them and to give them the needed power to spread his message.

*Jesus was and still is - on his disciples to continue spreading this message. This is why he left them and us here - to continue living "**in the world**" but he also informed them, that like himself, they had become no longer "**of this world***

And because they would be "in the world but not of the world" there would be consequences, there would be a reaction towards them and their message, by the world that they needed to be prepared for. So Jesus prays for them.

It is from Jesus' prayer in John 17 (especially section 14-20) that we get the expression "**in the world but not of the world**" but what exactly does this mean? [John 17:14-16](#)

Several times in his teachings, Jesus informed his disciples that because of their association with him, because of their new faith in him, they had been transformed by the God's Holy Spirit in their lives, they have been substantially changed from their former selves. **They had become more like Jesus and less like less like their old selves, less like the world in which they had once lived.**

And, because of this, not only would they no longer fit comfortably back into their old lives, into a world that only marginally acknowledged God.

But also that the fallen world, the part of the world that did not want to honor God, would no longer welcome them as it formerly had: that the world in many ways would become hostile to them - and their God given message .

Why? **Because the same message of God's love and forgiveness for those who accept it, is also a message of judgment and condemnation for those who reject it.**

John's gospel opens by describing Jesus as the bringer of light into the darkened world. And those who loved God would walk in his light. But that those who hate God, who wanted to live a selfish life, a sinful life – would run from this light. Would hate this light.

Thus the more a Christian becomes like Jesus and less like the world in which they continue to live the more the world will instinctively resist them; the same way it resisted Jesus; the same way our human bodies resist foreign substances.

If you get a foreign substance in your body: a bacteria from a scratch, a virus from someone's sneeze ... as soon as your body recognizes that it has been invaded it begins to fight back it forms anti-bodies , essentially tiny soldiers to fight and kill off the invaders. Those aches and pains, that fever you have – was not caused by the Flu virus, it was caused by your body in trying to fight off that flu virus.

Human culture is the same way: a stranger moves into our neighbor, a different nationality, a different way of dressing or speaking, a different skin color. You would hope that they would be welcomed. But to tell the truth, most people will watch them, try to avoid them, perhaps even try to drive them back out of the neighborhood.

Sad isn't it. But this is the way the world responds to anyone who is "different." And those who have become dedicated disciples of Christ – will in the same way be different from and resisted by the world: "*in the world but not of the world*"

What then should a Christian do? How can they live in this world while not being of this world? That is what the majority of the New Testament letters have been trying to teach us.

1. We are not to love the world or the things in it - [I John 2:15-17](#) The world's values are not God's values: God values love, forgiveness, personal holiness. The world values: power, wealth, and personal happiness.

2. So as lovers of God, we are urged not conform our lives to the ways of the world - [Romans 12:2](#) Paul writes: ***Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good,***

But at the same time we must still live in the world. And if we are to live in the world, share God's love for the world, bring God's kingdom to pass in the world – we must touch the world

Jesus, our great example, came into the world of men - [John 1:10](#). HE lived, worked, walked, talked, and in all ways befriended the lost and lonely people of this world.

But Jesus was not of the world - [John 17:14](#), HE did not sin. He did not ignore sin in others, he did not tolerate people who pretended to be holy while holding sin in their hearts.

In the same way, while we try to live a holy life, we still must love, work with, seek out and purposely associate with the lost and lonely, with sinners – just like Jesus. - [I Corinthians 5:9-10](#)

The point is that while we live in this world and minister to this world, we cannot let the world influence us.

(Like Ronald Reagan – we need to be Teflon Christians)

This is a hard task to accomplish.

It takes effort,
it takes discipline,
it takes maturity,
it takes courage,

it takes prayer,
"to be in this world but not of this world."

Mistake 1: In the world and of the world

1. There is a strong trend in the religious community to exist in the world and to want to be accepted by the world
 - a. Denominations are changing their doctrines to be more acceptable to the worldly
 - b. Tolerance of sin has become a virtue

2. On an individual scale, people fall due to temptation and cease to strive to remain distinct from the world
 - a. Sin deceives them into leaving God for the world - [Hebrews 3:12-14](#)
 - b. If we live in the world, and follow the sins of the world, then the world owns us - [John 8:34](#)

3. If we select friends of the world, and allow them to influence our choices, then we become like them – of the world - [I Corinthians 15:33](#)

4. Have you ever walked through a large crowd that is moving one way, while you are attempting to go in the opposite direction?
 - a. It is hard to do; yet, that is what God is expecting of us
 - b. The world is running headlong to destruction while we are going the opposite direction - [Matthew 7:13-14](#)

Living in the world, but not of the world -- takes effort -- it takes prayer.

Mistake 2: Trying to avoid the world while living in it

5. Many well-meaning people try to fight the influence of the world by quarantining themselves “ghetto-ization” sometimes people were forced to live in ghettos – more often they prefer to.
6. Some religious groups, such as the monks and nuns of the Catholic church, withdraw from contact with the world in monasteries.
7. In the 1800's religious communes became popular as groups, such as the Shakers, Hutterites, Pennsylvania Dutch attempted to keep the world out of their lives
8. 3.. Today, many “evangelical” Churches are also encapsulating themselves (turning inward) ignoring the surrounding community – effectively becoming “closed cults” (you are welcome to come in , join us, be like us, but we’re not going out “there.” **Example:** *“you have to be a member of our church to receive help from our church”*
9. The problem is that doing so shirks our duty as followers of Christ
 - a. Jesus came into the world to heal it - [Matthew 9:10-13](#)
 - b. Jesus came seek and save the lost: remember Zacchaeus? -
10. Avoidance often sounds good, but doesn’t work - [Colossians 2:20-23](#)
Think about it.
 - a. Has the sequestered life protected the Amish from the influences of the outside world?
 - b. Does the celibate lives of the Catholic priest help them avoid sexual sins?

In other words, avoiding the world doesn’t make avoiding temptation easier

So how do we strike the balance of being in the world without being a part of it?

This is what Peter was trying to explain to the Church in his letters (1 Peter 2:9 & 11, 3:8-9, 15)

What have we become? (1 Peter 2:9)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

How do we live here but not of here? (1 Peter 2:11)

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.

Living like an alien?

Recognize that you are a foreigner
Live below the radar.

Living like an exile?

Don't settle down, don't think of this place as home.
Always be prepared to return to your real home

2:13 be politically conservative: *For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme,*

2:18 Always strive to be employee of the month: *Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh.*

3:1-7 Wives and Husbands live in obvious love and harmony.

3:8-13

Unity of spirit
Sympathy – try to understand
Love
Tender hearted
Humble minded
Repaying good for evil

15 IN your hearts let Christ rule singularly -- always be prepared to give an answer

but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you;

So how do we live in the world but not of the world?

We are to live joyously in the world, but not of the world, for the sake of the world that we like
Jesus before us is seeking to save

Amen.