

The World*January 2009 Commentary*

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A sermon by one of my favorite ministers, Charles Stanley, suggested the topic for this newsletter. He preached on November the 9, 2008, on Romans 12:2. Be not conformed to the world, but be transformed by a complete change of your mind. The word *world* caught my attention because few people define the meaning of world for us. As a matter of fact, the Bible mentions it first in Genesis 11:1, and then 238 more times. It has two meanings in the Bible. First, it means the planet we live on; and second, it refers to the people who inhabit the earth. Implied in the definition of people is another meaning – the civilizations and cultures people have established. Among these people, there are also two other subcultures, those who do not know Jesus and those who do know him. The people who do not know him and those who do know him belong to two kingdoms. There is the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. Satan rules over the kingdom of darkness, and Jesus over the kingdom of light. It is the Kingdom of God (light) that Jesus came to establish.

Because of the division of kingdoms, Jesus said the world would hate us and persecute us (John 14:17). His prophecy has been true ever since he ministered in the world. His crucifixion was the work of the world. Since that time, there has never been a time when the world was not persecuting Christians. It began with the Jews and was continued by the Romans, then by the barbarians. After them, it was the Ottomans, and all other religions. Now it is the humanists, atheists, communists, homosexual activists, Muslims and Hindus. People do not tolerate righteousness, instead they love evil. It has been said that no worldly persons aspire to rise to the level of the righteous man or woman; they only aspire to drag them down to their own level. They do this by persecution. This persecution is orchestrated by the god of the world (Satan) who is a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). He uses any means he can think of to destroy

people who believe.

He can murder, but usually he helps people kill themselves. Four of my children were recently at a high school reunion and commented on two of their classmates who in their youth were drug users. They observed that these two appeared more aged than others in their classes.

Satan has initiated a battle of the sexes so men and women divorce their spouses. Some of their classmates have been married as many as three times. Satan does this through lies he propagates about marriage. It is interesting that the lives of their classmates who had been filled with the selfishness that humanism brings, were characterized by pain and suffering. The lives of the Christians were characterized by selflessness, intact marriages and successfully reared children. There was much suffering in the lives of their pagan peers.

Why do citizens of the two kingdoms differ? The answer is that they have different worldviews. Most people cannot define worldview. Even though it is an essential construct of psychiatry it is not well defined. Realizing this, I searched literature to find the best definition. I found one by Leo Apostel, a Belgian philosopher, who seemed to me to define it best. He says a worldview consists of a model that allows us to understand how the world functions. It includes the universe, the earth, life, the mind, and society and culture. It also includes an explanation of it all. How did it come into existence? It includes futurology. Where are we going? We need values. These are beliefs that make a favorable difference in our lives. And finally, knowledge or cognitions that allow us to cope with the environment.

If we inspect each of these, we find the world and Christians differ profoundly. The world believes the universe began with an explosion of a singularity. This is called a Big Bang. They do not say where the singularity came from. Christians believe a supernatural God spoke the universe into existence, and if it was the explosion of a singularity, he was responsible for its existence. The earth was made up of the debris left over after the sun was formed. It coalesced and became the earth and other planets. Christians

believe God ordained its existence for the express purpose of putting mankind here.

The world believes life came about by the spontaneous union of chemicals in a primordial soup facilitated by lightning strikes. Christians believe God created life by his Word. The world believes the mind came about by progressive evolution. Christians believe it was created by God and it is like his. Finally, societies and cultures evolved out of a need for mutual self-protection. Christians believe God ordained them by endowing man with radical needs for relationships.

The world believes life on this planet is all there is. The futurology of the world is that we are extinguished when we die. The Christian believes there is eternal life to be spent in Heaven or Hell. We will exist in another dimension.

One major difference is that the value systems and character structure of the persons in the two groups differ. The world is interested in education, science, other religions, political systems, money, sex, sports, alcohol, power, fame and fortune. Even though it indulges in them *ad infinitum*, they do not bring satisfaction or meaning to their lives. They are as Solomon said, all meaningless.

If we look further at the contrast between the Christian view and the pagan view of values, we find education will not bring meaning. One can know more than others about everything, but knowledge loses its appeal; and people find it does not bring meaning to their lives. Schools and colleges teach beliefs, but these beliefs do not make a favorable difference in their lives. One can worship science like I once did, and in spite of great achievements, there is only temporary meaning in making new discoveries. Other religions do not do it either. They do not bring love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness and self-control. These fruits of the Spirit can only be realized when the Holy Spirit dwells in us. Other religions cannot promise eternal life on the same order as our heaven. Our heaven is a place where we will exist in a new dimension of existence. We will still be who we are on earth and be recognizable to one another. All the negatives of human existence will be swept away.

In contrast, Muslims, if they are martyrs, expect to have brocaded couches, fresh fruit, streams of crystal clear water, and 70 virgins to supply their every need. Hinduism promises people reincarnation as a cow, or monkey or insect – one either moves down the animal order, or sometimes up, depending on whether one's Karma is bad or good. There is an almost endless cycle of reincarnation. Buddhism believes that heaven is to be had when a person comes into the state of nirvana. This is a worldly state and is gained by getting all thoughts and emotions under control. The soul dissolves with death and a new one is constructed, but there is no permanent unchanging self.

Religious political systems do not bring satisfaction or meaning to lives. All of them fail. Look at National Socialism (Nazis), Communism, kingdoms like Alexander's empire, the Roman empire, the British empire, and the country of Egypt. Some systems may exist for hundreds of years, but most only for a few centuries. The longest lasting was Egypt.

Money and material possessions cannot bring meaning or happiness. We always have too little, and if we have too much it will bring unhappiness. I have never known a happy rich person unless they were Christians. Every one wants a piece of a rich person, so they have to set up all kinds of defenses to keep what they have or to keep away people who have their hands out wanting a piece of the pie. Many of them have to keep on making money because that is where they get meaning.

Sex is a biological drive that never can be completely satiated. Continued sexual activity eventually results in boredom so people have to seek new ways of stimulation to get satisfaction. Worldly men are notoriously promiscuous. If they do not have the internal inhibitions of the Holy Spirit, they will seek new and more exciting outlets for their sexuality. This is carried to the extreme in some homosexuals who may have as many as 1,000 partners in a lifetime. Most have at least 500. I have known a number of married heterosexuals who have had as many as 30 extramarital liaisons. It is a fact that fornication and adultery only bring immediate satisfaction, and all kinds of problems can arise. Women can get pregnant, both

women and men can get sexually transmitted diseases, and sex without intimacy (love) is never as satisfying as sex in marriage. Christians have much more satisfying sexual relationships than do non-Christians. This was revealed in a Redbook study done years ago.

Sports will not do it either. One of the biggest industries in the U.S. is the sports industry. When Rome fell, the people were rioting and demanding bread and circuses. Those bloodthirsty circuses were held with gladiators killing one another. They had training facilities just like our teams have today. They were then pitted in combat against opponents. One of them most often ended being killed. This was a result of the spectators giving the winner a signal of thumbs down. I just had a thought that we often hear, "kill the umpire" now in our stadia. Shades of Rome! We have not changed, have we?

Sports stars make all kinds of preposterous salaries. One star was recently given a contract that pays him \$150,000,000 over five years. Is a baseball pitcher really worth that much? Then, too, there are sports stars who grandstand by creating all kinds of controversy just to focus attention on themselves. They are like little boys, who at a gathering of any kind do all kinds of mischievous things to attract attention. This speaks to the immaturity of a few people in the sports world. I must add that the sports writers and broadcasters are often just as puerile.

The fact that there are four or more sports channels on TV is a commentary on the worship of sports. All we have to do is look at the stadia filled with people and their behavior, and we can realize that sports have become a religion worshiped by the bulk of our society. The price of tickets is unbelievable. I saw where one sporting event had some tickets that sold for \$2,500. Can you believe it? Andy Griffiths soliloquy, "What it was, was football" is the best description of the sport.

We have long known that alcohol and drugs will not bring satisfaction or meaning. I spent 62 years taking care of alcoholics and drug addicts. I began my career taking care of 32 female alcoholics and drug addicts. At the end of the year, only one of my patients had remained sober for longer than two weeks. At

the federal narcotics center in Lexington, KY, abstinence from heroin after discharge was about one month or less. Alcohol and drugs distort reality, but they only do so for a short time. A person then has to take more to maintain the distorted state. They remove inhibitions so that the person ends up doing immoral things. Both contribute mightily to crime and sexual indiscretions and family dysfunction. The physical and mental complications of alcohol ingestion are numerous, and the wages of over indulgence are still death as it is for all sin. The Psalmist tells us that wine, which was the everyday drink of the Israelis, was not good for a person if they drank too much of it. It was described as a mocker and beer was a brawler. It is something to eschewed totally if we wish to avoid sin.

And then there is the drive for power. It arises out of pride. All one has to do is to look around the world and you find some leaders are driven by a desire for power. The best example today is Robert Mugabe, whose clinging to power has ruined his country. Hugo Chavez, who having gained control of power in Venezuela, is bringing his country to the brink of disaster. In Islamic countries, there are constant power plays to gain control of governments.

Fame is also a worldly value. The seeking after fame gives rise to all kinds of problems. We find scientists faking their research data to gain fame. This has been especially true in biotechnology. But nowhere is fame extolled any more than in sports. We have the college sports halls of fame, state sports halls of fame, baseball, basketball, football and hockey halls of fame. Then there are such things as the motion picture hall of fame and the country music hall of fame. We also have the auto racing hall of fame, the horse racing hall of fame, and I can go on, as there seems to be no end to the halls of fame that are out there. But to what avail? I remember that Michael Green, a famous theologian, after his academic credentials and credits were read, said that they would get him nowhere as he stood before the Throne of God on judgment day. All that will count is the one in whom he has his righteousness – Jesus.

Finally, fortune will also get none of us anywhere. We cannot take it with us. A local wag once said, "There are no U-Haul Its after hearses." It is also true that giving it away to colleges or charities will not

get us any merit. Large amounts of money (or fortune) seem to never do anyone great good. You can read stories of lottery winners and very often their money soon departs from them. Right now in the local economic recession, we see people losing almost all of their fortunes in the stock market decline. Then, too, I look at the children of people who have amassed large fortunes and they very often spend or lose most or all of their inheritance.

It is no wonder we are warned against being “of the world.” All our love of the world will bring is unhappiness. It may not come in our lifetime, but will be held against us in the afterlife. The Bible gives us directions as to how to live in the Kingdom of God, and we should live by them. Jesus told us how to live life. He said we should love God with all of our beings, and we should love our neighbors as ourselves. We then are commanded to love one another as he has loved us. Finally, we are to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and prisoners. Then because of our love for our neighbors, we are to witness to them and make disciples out of them.

We have believed that education will make a difference in our lives and it will, but some of the things we are taught are foolishness. This is especially true of values taught in the schools. We Christians have to believe the truth of God’s Word, especially his moral teachings

Our values concerning money are best summed up in John Wesley’s statement – we should make all we can, save all we can and give all we can. We are to owe no one. And above all, we are not to worship money. We are instead to lay up treasures in heaven. Laying up treasures on earth has gotten more people in trouble in the last year than you would have ever imagined.

As for sex, we are to flee fornication and adultery. Homosexual sex and bestiality are forbidden. Sex is for procreation and is to be carried out in a loving stable marriage. It is not for recreation. Pornography is another form of fornication or adultery.

What is the answer? It is what God wants for us. We are to be humble and not seek fame or fortune. We do not want to seek the approval of men. We desire God's approval.

This letter is a prolegomena to my next one that will be devoted to the sin of our nation. I look forward to sending it to you.