

Distinction: Being In But Not of the World

John 17:11, 14-16, 18 says:

My brothers and sisters have you ever sent a child, your child off to school as a beginner in kindergarten? What was foremost on your mind? Probably that the child was safe, that the child would be protected, and that they be kept from harms way, am I right about it?

Here my brothers and sisters, in John 17:11 we see that Jesus is praying for his disciples then and even today. He knows that time is winding down for him in this world and that he will not be their physical protector any longer. He also knows that they will be on their own, and need support.

Church, he is praying as any faithful parent would for their family and he reminds the disciples of the following reality.

My brothers and sisters, is this a true statement, according to your understanding of the Word? “The Bible says we are in the world, but not of the world”? What say you as an answer? My answer to you is no and yes. No because there is no specific Bible verse that states these words.

Yes, because it is spoken in the Bible, and more specifically by Jesus Christ, where he informs us of this truth. It is in Jesus’ prayer for his disciples and we answer his prayer when we put this timeless truth into practice.

However, the statement “We are in the world, but not of the world,” does not go far enough. To be exact, what Jesus was praying if another phrase was added? The full statement would read, “We are in the world, but not of the world, but not out of the world.”

Now my brothers and sisters let us examine each of these phrases for a little while. Do you mind? They are “in the world, not of the world. And not out of the world.

The first phrase has to do with our present location. We are in the world (v.11), but he will no longer be in the world. The Word world in New Testament thought could mean one of three things: this planet we call earth, the world of people, or the world as a principle.

Let me give you an illusion. Let us imagine that, we are like an astronaut in outer space or a diver hundreds of feet beneath the ocean’s surface; that we are living outside our natural elements.

It is possible to survive here, given that we are protected, because the world is not our home. The problem for many people is that they become too attached to

this world. They get caught up in the world's system and values and as a result, become drunk with greed, seduced by things, and influenced by selfishness.

My brothers and sisters, by being in the world the disciples would be exposed to and need protection from the world's values, morals, standards, and ideas, which are opposed to God.

This world is a scary place. This world is different from God. In this world, the disciples could expect to be hated and you can too because the world stands in opposition to and in direct conflict with God himself.

But, my brother and sisters, Jesus did not tell us to be removed from the world and lead a monastic life style cut off from the world.

After a while, one can't tell the difference between a believer and a non-believer. By the way, if you can't tell the difference between the two. I ask you are a believer then a believer? This question my brothers and sisters then leads to the next thought.

The second phrase has to do with our powerful distinction. Our protector is God. Our protection comes from our heavenly Father, God himself. This by the way is the only time in the New Testament that God is referred to as "Holy Father" (v. 11). This is an interesting combination of words, don't you think?

My brothers and sisters, Holy means separated, or set apart. God is holy; we are to be holy. God is separated from the world and we are to be separated from the world. Here's the irony; God is the Holy Father in heaven who, sent God, the Holy Son, into the world.

Now my brothers and sisters get this, we, his children, are to be holy, and yet live in the world, or as the saying goes; we are in the world but not of the world. Actually my brothers and sisters we need to add another phrase to make it true. In other words we are to be holy while living in the world.

We are not of the world (vv.14-16) here Jesus repeats himself for clarification and emphasis. I repeat too, He is reminding us that we do not belong to this world; that there is a distinctive nature about our lives." We are not of the world," there is a distinctive nature about our lives .We are set apart, and we are different.

To put it another way the Bible tells us that "We are a peculiar people." The Biblical word is holiness. What are we set aside by? My brothers and sisters, we are set aside by Grace, mercy and love.

The second word The Name of the Father, determines the essence of our protection. Our guardianship comes from the Father. He is our divine parent. The

name you recall stands for the whole person; the character, the nature, the very essence of God himself, and what is that name “Jesus.”

Yes that name is Jesus Christ. In the unique address, “Holy Father,” we have a reminder of both aspects of God’s nature; His Separateness and His Strength. Amen!

My brothers and sisters, holiness is not being an odd person, but being a different person. It is not displaying an attitude of “I’m better than you,” but displaying an action of, “I different than the world.” We need to make sure that as a saved people we transmit the correct story.

Don’t go around beating your chest like you’re all that, remember, my brothers and sisters,” if it had not been for the LORD on your side where would you be”? Yes, it is God who gives us the power to live like Jesus through the “Holy Spirit”

My brothers and sisters, Holiness is a survival tactic for living in the world. Without holiness a believer cannot be distinguished from a non-believer. The only way to keep ourselves from being caught up in the affairs and values of this world is through a commitment to be holy in our living through Jesus Christ.

Author Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase sums it up: “As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God’ life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness. God said, “I am holy; you be holy.” (1ST. Peter 1:16 The message).

The third phrase has to do with our penetrating inclusion .We are not of the world (v.15).Jesus was not an escapist. He didn’t advocate a monastic lifestyle. Disciples of Jesus are to live in the world but not be of the world either.

In other words, we have a responsibility to engage the culture in which we live in, without it rubbing off on us. There should be a Teflon coating to our lives. We are to face the world’s system, without being swallowed up by it. We must stand with people of the world, but stand alone with Jesus Christ. Amen.

My brothers and sisters, isolation was never Jesus’ plan for his disciples. He intended for us to live out our faith among people, not away from them. We can’t reach people unless we are closed to them. We are therefore, sent into the world. Just so we wouldn’t miss it, because Jesus prayed to the Father, “As you sent me into the world, I also sent them into the world” (v.18)

My brothers and sisters, we are in the world, not of the world, but not out of the world, sent into the world. God loves the world. God wants us to be a part of his rescue mission to reach the people. “ For God so loved the world that He gave

His only begotten Son that who so ever believe in Him shall not perish but have ever lasting live”(JN.3-16).

We can't do it cloistered in holy huddles; we are to go into the world. My brothers and sisters, Jesus demands it of us. We must go into the world just like he did.

He doesn't want his disciples to be “statutes on display” in church groups, touting their spiritual prowess to one another. We are not to become religious museum pieces. But rather my brothers and sisters we are to become foot soldiers deployed into the enemy territory to reach those who are far from God.

With an understanding of our role in the world, how can we be the answer to Jesus' prayer?

My brothers and sisters, we are to be separated from sin but not be isolated from sinners. We are to be in the Word, soaking up God's truth; but we also need to be in the world, seeking the lost.

We are to have contact with the world, without being contaminated by the world.

We maintain a delicate balance between separation from the world and penetration on the world.

We are to pray for protection as we penetrate the world.