

# Word Study **World**

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W.E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* reveals that one of the Greek words translated "world" (*kosmos*) is actually used seven different ways by the New Testament writers. For the purpose of this article I am interested in number five: "The present condition of human affairs, in alienation from and opposition to God." Incidentally, such English words as cosmology, cosmopolitan and cosmetic are derived from *kosmos*. Etymology can be a real eye-opener.

## **PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE**

Where is *kosmos* used in the above sense in the Word? Please note the following: "The world cannot hate you; but me it hates, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." (John 7:7). "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." (1Corinthians 2:12). "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world..." (Galatians 4:3). "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Galatians 6:14). "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." (Colossians 2: 8). "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27 ). "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world hears them." (1 John 4:5 ). "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness." (1 John 5:19).

## **FURTHER DEFINITIONS**

How have other writers defined the "world" as it is used in the above passages and elsewhere. I have noted the following from my personal studies: "Pagan society with its false values, its false standards and its false gods." "The world system, wicked and alienated from God, yet cultured, educated, powerful, outwardly moral at times, the system of which Satan is the head, the fallen angels and the demons are his servants, and all mankind other than the saved, are his subjects." "Humanity as alienated from God, and acting in opposition to Him and to His revelation." "All the floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitutes a most real and effective power, being the moral or immoral atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale." "Human society insofar as it is organised on wrong principles, characterised by base desires, false values and egoism." "The world is the domain of false gods, perverted passions and wicked walks." These should be sufficient for our purpose.

## IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

Fellow believers, we are all in this world, but we must not be of the world. The ship is all right in the ocean as long as the ocean is not in the ship. But when the ocean is in the ship, it is sunk! The Christian is all right in the world as long as the world is not in the Christian. But if the world conquers the Christian then he or she is doomed. It is that simple. We must, therefore, resist the temptations of the world at all costs. Of course, we cannot do this in our own strength. We need the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives to overcome all things, including Satan himself. And remember, one of the titles of Satan is "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). I always take great comfort from the words of the apostle John when he wrote to believers: "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Some saints believe that the way to win the battle with the world is to go and hide away somewhere. This, I believe, is a great mistake. The only way we can win the world for Christ is to be in it and to influence it by our lives and by the preaching of the gospel. After all, Jesus said we were "the salt of the earth." (Matthew 5:13). If the salt is never released from its container then what good can it do? No, Christians cannot help but live among the "worldly"; and in an immoral and wicked society, followers of the Lord should set an example to all. As someone once said: "When in Rome, don't do as the Romans do, but do as the Romans ought to do."

We live in difficult times, but it has always been thus. Do not think that the early Christians had it easier in their world. They did not. They were, of course, surrounded by paganism. Actually, in Britain today, and in most other places, Christians also live in a pagan world. The false values, false standards and false gods are everywhere. Today, what we call the "Western World" is in moral, spiritual and religious decline. I have just read again many of the books of the late Francis Schaeffer. In the late 1960's and 70's especially, he opened my eyes to what was going on in the modern world like no other. For example, in his book '*How Should We Then Live?*' he writes: "As the more Christian-dominated consensus weakened, the majority of people adopted two impoverished values: *personal peace* and *affluence*. Personal peace means just to be left alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, whether across the world or across the city – to live one's life with minimal possibilities of being personally disturbed... Affluence means an overwhelming and ever-increasing prosperity – a life made up of things, things, and more things – a success judged by an ever-higher level of material abundance." He went on to say: "Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) in his '*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*' (1776-1788) said that the following five attributes marked Rome at its end: first, a mounting love of show and luxury; second, a widening gap between the very rich and the very poor (this could be among countries in the family, as well as in a single nation); third, an obsession with sex; fourth, freakishness in the arts, masquerading as originality, and enthusiasms pretending to be creativity; fifth, an increased desire to live off the state. It all sounds so familiar."

How then can we overcome the world? John wrote: "For whosoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4).