

Living Faithfully in the World

DAVE BAST

Living a life of faith in the midst of the world is a constant balancing act. Christians are called to be *in* the world but not *of* it. Is it possible that we have grown too worldly today without even noticing it? Well, as Christians how do we talk about this; how do we hold ourselves accountable for worldliness? Today's *Groundwork* examines what the Bible says about that. Stay tuned.

BOB HEERSPINK

From ReFrame Media and Words of Hope, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

Dave, a few years ago I was in the grocery store and I noticed one of my elderly parishioners up by the service counter. I came up to say hi, and as I did she said to me: Oops, you caught me. And I noticed she was sliding her lottery tickets into her purse.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; you know, I wonder if we had an honest survey of people in the pews, how many of them do buy lottery tickets every week?

BOB HEERSPINK

I think it is more than what you would think. At least, that little episode taught me that I had people in my church that were probably going down every week and buying their tickets.

DAVE BAST

It is really incredible to step back and look at the way that organized gambling – state sponsored gambling, much of it – has spread in our culture, in our time. I read a very disturbing article not so long ago that kind of documented the rise of that. You know, the first state lottery was begun in 1962. It was 1987 when a Supreme Court decision paved the way for spreading casinos way beyond the borders of Las Vegas or Atlantic City; and today...well, this is a statement from that article: Government boosterism has legitimized gambling, eroding what few moral scruples remained on the part of average people against engaging in behavior that just a few decades ago would have been considered largely unacceptable.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think that statement really raises an issue for debate. Are there really moral scruples involved here; because a lot of people would say it is not a big deal, it is just a form of entertainment, and it benefits the school systems in a lot of states, so why not augment the income of the states by opening the doors even wider than what they are opened today?

DAVE BAST

Yes, no kidding; I mean, this stream of revenue has become to state governments what crack is to an addict, you know; they cannot live without it; and I just wonder how we evaluate this as Christians. What kind of category do we put this in? Is it harmless fun? They call it the gaming industry...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

Kind of a verbal slight of hand. Is it really just a game?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, to really understand what gambling is about, we have to go to scripture, and I think, take a broader look at what the Bible says about an old-fashioned concept that isn't talked about much, but I think it still matters – counts – and that is the concept of worldliness.

DAVE BAST

Yes, there is not a whole lot that is said specifically about gambling in the Bible. I mean, one thing that comes to mind is the soldiers underneath Jesus' cross tossing for his clothes, but that is not a direct application; but this idea of worldliness...it sounds so antiquated, doesn't it? I mean, for many of us it conjures up images of legalism and certain codes of behavior that were rejected.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right. There was a lot of talk years ago about worldly Christians are the ones who are engaging in some social drinking or they play cards or they go to movies; and there were these mores that grew up around worldliness that a lot of Christians have stepped back from because they have come to understand, I think correctly, that that approach to worldliness tends to legalism and doesn't really get at the heart of what worldliness is about.

DAVE BAST

Yes; it has a tendency to define as sinful activities that are probably neutral in themselves, or maybe harmless, or even positive; but worse than that, I think, is the way it led to hypocrisy so often. You know, in our own tradition I know you and I were raised with rules about Sunday – what you could do and couldn't do – and it all kind of brought to mind Jesus' word about the Pharisees, how they would tithe on their kitchen garden herbs, but they would neglect the weightier matters of the law like justice and mercy; and that can happen with legalism.

BOB HEERSPINK

The difficulty is, because of the abuse of the concept of worldliness, we have often thrown that out the door as Christians; and yet, when you go to the Bible, you find that the whole concept of worldliness is very much a key part of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. If you go to a passage, for example, like 1 John 2; let me just read you what it says, starting in verse 15:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride and possessions – is not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, along with its desires; but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

DAVE BAST

So, pretty straight forward; it starts with a command: Do not love the world or the things of the world. What could be clearer than that? What is worldliness? Worldliness means loving the world and its things.

BOB HEERSPINK

But that has become a problem for a lot of Christians because they have taken that in a very literal sense to mean that you cannot appreciate the things the world offers. Can you enjoy a good dinner? Can you enjoy the beauty of a sunset? Are these things that are acceptable for Christians or are they, in some sense of the word, secular?

DAVE BAST

Yes; well, you know, obviously we all love the world in the sense of the wonder and grandeur of God's creation, and all the good things that it contains; and we ought to love those things. They are good. God made them – God created them that way. The Bible says that every good and perfect gift comes from above; from the Father of Lights; and Paul goes on to say everything should be received with thanksgiving. So, yes; I mean, you push it in that direction and it would be wrong even to love our children or our grandchildren; they are part of the world; but no, we love all that. The key, I think, is to understand what John means in this passage from 1 John 2, by the word *world*, because that term can be used in different senses in different parts of scripture.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, here he is using the term really to talk about the world in rebellion against God.

DAVE BAST

Right, exactly.

BOB HEERSPINK

It is the world as it takes a stance against the true Lord of Creation.

DAVE BAST

Right, right; you know, *world* can mean creation. That is good; we love that world. *World* can mean people: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. We love that, too; but here in 1 John, *world* takes on kind of a dark, sinister meaning. It is the world under the dominion of Satan, who Jesus called the prince of this world. Worldliness, that is, loving the world in its rejection of God – in its anti-God tendencies.

So, let's pursue that track a little bit further in just a moment; but first we would like to draw you into our conversation. Let us tell you how you can participate here at *Groundwork*.

BOB HEERSPINK

Listeners like you make *Groundwork* what it is. Our website, groundworkonline.com, is another way that you can work with us to dig deeper into the scriptures. There, we continue to reflect on discussions that we have had today about our world and the Bible, as well as many other conversations that listeners have begun about scripture and how it affects their lives.

We would also like to ask you to help us think about upcoming programs. One of the areas that we are going to explore in upcoming programs is the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Jesus is still alive and active in the world today. How do you meet him in your personal life? Share with us your thoughts and ask us your questions. Finding us is easy; just visit our website: groundworkonline.com.

Segment 2

BOB HEERSPINK

Dave, we have to dig a little deeper into this whole idea of worldliness, and right here in the text in 1 John 2, there is actually a definition of worldliness. It is the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride in possessions.

DAVE BAST

Yes, those are three very important phrases, I think; and they all can be a little bit misleading, you know; take the first one: The desires of the flesh. Now, to most people today that probably sounds like some kind of sexual thing, but flesh in the New Testament refers to our fallen nature – our sinful nature.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

And just as the world out there has fallen, something inside us is twisted – sort of turned away from God; so, the desires of the flesh would refer to all the kind of hungers that we have for things that are not God. You know the famous line of St. Augustine: Our hearts are restless until they rest in you; he said about God: God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; when I think of the desires of the flesh, I really think of that spot inside that needs filling with God – that we can only fill with God's presence – and we just have this desire if we aren't in connection with God to fill it with everything else.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Even good things!

DAVE BAST

All kinds of stuff; you know, food for some people, quite literally; or sex or possessions or money or success or fame. The list goes on and on and on; but our flesh craves those things because they think that is what will satisfy us, that is what will make us happy and complete.

BOB HEERSPINK

But without God in there, it is a bottomless pit. It just sucks in more and more and more; and I think it really plays into this description here of the desire of the eyes.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; there is a close connection between those two because what we see out there is often presented to us as so alluring – so wonderful – so glamorous – that it appeals to the hunger we feel inside us.

BOB HEERSPINK

We are subjected to tens of thousands of advertisements a year; and all of them really are presenting things that we are tempted to think can fill that hunger deep within.

DAVE BAST

So, the desires of our flesh within us and the desires of what our eyes see outside of us kind of combine together to pull us toward those things of the world, and away from God; and then there is the pride in possessions part.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, and that is what we actually have. The possessions that are in our hands...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

That we begin to think really give us life, when those things really don't give us life.

DAVE BAST

And some of the things we possess aren't objects – aren't physical things: houses or money or lands; but they are maybe our class or our status or our race, even, or our nationality; all the things that absurdly tempt us to feel superior and snobbish toward others.

BOB HEERSPINK

Now, there are two problems according to 1 John with worldliness, and the first is all these things with which we tend to fill our lives, they are temporary – they are passing away.

DAVE BAST

Yes; John says the world and its things don't last, and how true that is. Everything that we sort of amass for ourselves...you know the old saying: you never saw a hearse pulling a U-Haul...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

They all end up someday in the landfill; as well as those human things – those worldly things – that we use to inflate our sense of worth or our status.

BOB HEERSPINK

And there is even a bigger problem, and that is, John says, you cannot love possessions, you cannot love the things of the world and God.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

They are simply antithetical to each other.

DAVE BAST

Well, listen again to what he says: 2:15^bIf anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him.

Wow! In other words, you can love God or you can love the world, but you cannot love both at once. You have to choose; it is one or the other.

BOB HEERSPINK

But, the big challenge with worldliness is that it is so deceptive. There is some much deceit that is operative in worldliness. We really do think our value and our future depend on the things of the world.

DAVE BAST

I guess in a way it goes back to the original temptation. You know what Eve said after she sinned: The serpent deceived me and I ate. It is the oldest trick in the book and it keeps on going now. We see these visions in front of us, and we are fooled into thinking that is reality – that is the truth – that is what I really want.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think that is where you see that illustrated in the way gambling is presented. There is this notion that if you win the lottery you are really going to come into the future...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

That will be filled with delight. I mean, so many people are actually planning on their retirement on the basis that maybe they will win the lottery.

DAVE BAST

All those millions will solve all my problems, so we think. You know, a friend of mine was telling me about a research project he came across once where somebody interviewed thirty mega-lottery winners; I mean, big, big winners; and of the thirty, twenty-nine said: It was the worst thing that ever happened to me.

BOB HEERSPINK

Not even a neutral thing.

DAVE BAST

Yes, not a... It is the worst thing that ever happened to me.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, here is the question: How can we see through the deceit of worldliness? That is what we are going to come back to.

DAVE BAST

But first, since *Groundwork* is all about digging into the scripture and applying it to our lives, we want to tell you about some additional resources that we offer to guide you on your spiritual journey. We recommend two daily devotionals: *Words of Hope* and *Today*. Each one of them contains a Bible reading and a daily meditation. They are short and concise, but they do dig beneath the surface of scripture, so they are ideal for anyone with a busy life. Both of these devotionals are designed with you in mind. Whether you would like to receive each devotional in booklet form or have it delivered to your e-mail each day, you will always find the spiritual nourishment you are looking for. You can find out more information about the *Today* and the *Words of Hope* devotionals on the resource page of our website at groundworkonline.com.

Segment 3

BOB HEERSPINK

Okay, Dave, we have been talking about the power of worldliness with regard to deceit. How do we get past that deceit? How do we focus in on the truth?

DAVE BAST

Well, I think the first step is being aware of it. That is half the battle right there; just recognizing what a problem this is – what a threat it is to our spiritual lives. John says that love for the world is going to kill love for God – love for the Father; and if it kills that, it is ultimately going to kill us. So, this is a huge problem – a huge spiritual problem; and also recognizing, as John says, that part of the problem is inside us. It is not just the worldliness out there; the desires of the eyes, as he calls it; it is the desires of our flesh, our fallenness within, that correspond to that. So, it is a big enemy, and it is out there and it is in here.

BOB HEERSPINK

So we have to revive the word *worldliness* in our Christian vocabulary.

DAVE BAST

Rehabilitate it, yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

That would certainly be a step in the right direction.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; and as a real concept, not just this old-fashioned thing.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I think we have to begin to really name the deceit as we see it in very concrete places. I mean, you watch television, you see all these ads; you are watching TV with your kids. Why not name the deceit? Why not say: hey, that is a lie. You are not going to have a happier life because of the breakfast cereal you are eating!

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; or that beautiful hamburger that they show in front of you is actually terrible for you; and for that matter, it never looks like that when you go to buy it.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; it has been specially prepared by people who are trained to present hamburgers in beautiful ways to us.

DAVE BAST

Talk about naming the deceit, you know, and getting back to this gambling and lottery thing; I am holding in front of me the annual report from the State of Michigan Lottery for 2009. Now, that is our state, Bob; that is where we live...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

And we are complicit in this; and on the cover there are all these pictures of smiling faces, people holding up big checks, and over and over the word *winners* is emblazoned on it. Let's name the deceit there: That there are no real winners...

BOB HEERSPINK

How about the millions of losers?

DAVE BAST

Exactly; it is mostly about losing. The lottery is for losers.

BOB HEERSPINK

And even the people who win... Time and time again I read in the papers about people who won millions and it really ruined their lives.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely! Those stories are legion. They are everywhere. So, the real losers are the winners – the so-called winners.

Now, here is a third point, maybe: When it comes to the world and worldliness, don't compromise. I think we need to draw a line in the sand and say: No; I won't participate; not even a little. I won't go buy a lottery ticket. I will not set foot in a casino. They are evil places. It is not the fun of gaming, as they like to say.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, and maybe that is where we need to revive the truth that was in some of those old legalisms. No, we cannot go back to old legalisms, but there was a certain stance that was taken...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Against evil; and I think we have lost that in our Christian communities. We have basically said: you know, we can walk a little bit on both sides of the line and it won't hurt us; but it will.

DAVE BAST

You know, at least they had the virtue of being clear cut. They knew where there was a line and which side of the line they were on; and no, we don't want to revive legalism as a Christian thing, but we do need a principled stance against the world and its allures.

BOB HEERSPINK

There is something very powerful about consistency.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is what I think we are pursuing; consistency that allows us not to be perceived as hypocrites by those around us, including the people who we are trying to establish an example to, our own kids.

DAVE BAST

But for me, I guess the bottom line in all of this how do you fight worldliness? The bottom line is not negative. It is not about *don't*, although that is important, as we have just been saying; but the bottom line is the positive need to love God and pursue God and see in God our true fulfillment – the true satisfaction of all the things that we hunger for is to be found in knowing God. Everything else, even the best things that the world has to offer, is really only a kind of hint or maybe even a substitute for knowing God.

BOB HEERSPINK

We cannot break the power of worldliness ourselves. We cannot drive out worldliness and be empty. We need to fill ourselves with the love of God and the things he provides.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is so true; and you know, there is a wonderful promise in this text, too, that we have been looking at from 1 John. It is this: ^{2:17}The world (writes John) is passing away, along with its desires; but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Wow, there it is. Not only will love for God sustain us and protect us against this world and its desires – this passing away; but it gives us eternal life.

BOB HEERSPINK

Here is the future. The world is going to pass away, but we who are enfolded into God – enfolded into him by love for him – will abide forever; and all the good things of this world – the things that really matter – are going to be given to us for eternity.

DAVE BAST

As my father liked to say: All this and heaven, too.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly! Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation; and don't forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So, tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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