

The World: Our Position and Attitude in it

John 17.

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What is the believer's position with regard to the world as it exists today? And what should be his attitude towards it? The answer to the second question must be dependent upon the answer to the first. Our attitude in present circumstances must be governed by our position. It is futile for us to assume to settle things if we are not in a position to do so. So in considering what our **attitude** should be in regard to the remarkable and peculiar circumstances through which we pass, we must ask: What is my **position** in regard to them?

Let me point out that this group of chapters (14-17) has one under-lying thought, that is, that the believer is absolutely identified with Christ, before God the Father. We are identified with Him in a new relationship, a new joy, and a new position which He takes up as risen from the dead.

But in John 16 we get another side of the story. The Lord tells His disciples what treatment they are to expect from the world. He says, as it were, "Not only are you identified with Me in My position before the Father, in all the favour and blessing that attaches to that position, but you are identified with Me in My position of reproach and rejection before the world. If you have all the assets connected with My place before the Father, you must not be surprised to find you have got My liabilities in connection with the world." He intimated to them that they were to make up their minds to share His path of rejection even unto death. Does this sound strange to our ears? We have been so accustomed to a quiet peaceful life in this land, where Christianity has greatly modified the standards of behaviour, and have for generations past had such a time of ease, that we are apt to forget what the truth is as to the position we hold, a position of the greatest possible blessing before God, but a position of persecution and reproach, if we are true to our Master, in this world.

Now in John 17 we have the whole case presented with perfection. The Lord Himself lays down in the clearest possible way what our position is. Look first at verse 6. We have to remember that we are among those given to Christ by God the Father out of the world. Doubtless those words had special reference to the apostles, but verse 20 shows that they have every believer in view. The Lord prays for all His own right through the church's history, up to and including ourselves. It is a very touching thought that when the Lord Jesus paused outside the walls of Jerusalem, before crossing the brook that led to the garden, with His awe-struck disciples about Him in the quiet night, He uttered this prayer. His eye swept the centuries, and He embraced us all in that for which He prayed on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion. We too have been given to Christ by God the Father out of this world. He foreknew us in the past eternity, for as we read elsewhere, we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. His thoughts for us antedate the establishment of this material earth on which we tread. We need not be surprised, then, to find that our ultimate destiny lies outside it.

When the Lord was here, His own were under His continual guidance and care, but the moment had now come when He was to leave them. He is in spirit here already beyond the cross. He says to the Father, "Now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee." He left the world, as we know, by way of death, and resurrection, and ascension. He left it because rejected. Let us never forget that.

There are people who say, "If there is a God in heaven, why does He not interfere? Why does He

look down calmly on the atrocities that are being perpetrated?" Many answers might be given to these questions, but one very sufficient answer is, **Because Christ has been rejected.** The only One who can put things right has been here, and has been rejected, and until He comes again you need not be surprised at anything that may happen. Nothing can be right until the only One who can put things right takes them in hand. But when He does, it means judgment, and that is why God waits. God is never partial. In our wrongs and disappointments we would like God to interfere on our own particular and special behalf; but why should He? When God intervenes, He will do so in a far-reaching manner, and it means the day of judgment. When the time comes for wrongs to be righted, all wrongs will be righted. If God is going to interfere in judgment, we can only say, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps. 143: 2). It would mean an end of us all, apart from the provision that God's grace has made, so meantime He keeps silence. But the hour of His mercy is fast running to its close, and then He will intervene to put things right.

Here are a few humble folk, who love Him, and He loves them. They are going to be left without Him in the world, and the next thing is what we get in verse 14: "I have given them Thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." We are left in the world on the distinct understanding that we are not of it. We are not part of the world-system by which we are surrounded, and for that reason the world hates the Christian. Notice the Lord here makes Himself the standard. We are identified with Him in this.

Now notice a further thing in verse 18: "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." We have been taken out of the great world-system. We speak of a man being a "man of the world." By this we do not intend to emphasise the fact that he lives on this planet in contrast to dwelling in the moon, or being an inhabitant of Mars. We mean that he is absolutely and in every sense a man of the world-system that is all around us, so that he bears its stamp and impress. The Christian is taken out of the world in that sense. Notice here again that He, Christ Himself, is the standard. If it is a question of our separation from the world, it is even as Christ Himself is separated from it; if it is a question of being sent into the world, as in verse 18, that also is measured by the same standard. The Lord takes us out, breaks our links with this world, and then sends us back that we may be here for Him.

He Himself came into it with one great thought before Him. The supreme object that dominated the life of the Lord Jesus was the glory of God. Our benefit, great as it was, was not the primary thought before Him. He came into this world which at the instigation of Satan had cast off divine allegiance, always rightly representing God, always perfectly revealing Him, and ultimately working out redemption for sinners. In reading the Gospels, we see how again and again there was the temptation presented to Him to turn from the main line of God's purpose and run into a siding, but He never did so. I mean such instances as when a man came up to Him and said, in effect, "I have got a brother who is not straight speak to him that he divide the inheritance with me." The Lord's answer was, "Who made Me a judge or a divider over you?" His business was not to deal with social matters and to remove those inequalities which are so pronounced. Socialists actually wish to claim Jesus as one of themselves, even with a scripture like this staring them in the face. Here is a great social problem presented to the Lord, and He declines to touch it. It would have been leaving the main track of that for which He was here. There was also a national or political question raised about paying tribute to Caesar, but the Pharisees did not get the answer they expected, for the Lord only used the occasion to throw into relief that which was the supreme question: the rights of God.

Now we Christians are left here on those lines. The Lord has sent us into the world that we may represent Him rightly, and promote His interests. Remember what the Apostle said in 2 Corinthians 5

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ." An ambassador is a gentleman of very considerable knowledge and skill, who is entrusted by the Government with the important task of representing king and country in a foreign land. He does not belong to that land. The British ambassador in Paris is not a Frenchman. His business is not to see that the streets of Paris are perfectly swept. He does not concern himself with the latest social improvements of that land. He may be invited to do some things here and there, but if so he does them as an outsider. He is there in Paris simply to represent his country. His thought is, what will best further the interests of the king and country he represents.

Now the apostles, in a very special way, were ambassadors for Christ. We may not be so, in quite the same sense, but we are **attached to the embassy**. In Paris there is the ambassador, but he has helpers. He has a considerable number of clerks and servants. The honour of the country is bound up with the behaviour of all, even the humblest. Everyone in the embassy will so act as to uphold the credit and further the interests of the country he represents.

Let us never forget that our place in this world is to be attached to the embassy of the absent King. We belong to His country. We have got His peace, His Spirit, His joys. We are here to represent Him. If we lay this well to heart, it will answer for us a hundred different questions as to what the Christian's attitude should be. I think if I were attached to the embassy in Paris, as a Briton I should be very glad if I had an opportunity to help individual

Frenchmen. (I use this as an illustration). I should be glad to serve to any extent within my power the people by whom I am surrounded. I should like to treat everybody with kindness and consideration, but I should always bear in mind that I am not there just to do that. That is incidental. I am there to represent my King, and everything has to be gauged by that fact.

I may be asked: Does not the Scripture say, "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith"? Yes, indeed, just as I would at once assist a wounded man if I saw an accident in a Paris street. Still I should not spend my time walking about the streets on the chance of being able to do such things. Yes, and it does say, "**especially to the household of faith.**" Do not let it be said in Paris that the embassy is starving. That would be a bad testimony. Always consider first that you are there rightly to represent your King.

Is my little parable sufficiently plain? Our great business down here is to rightly serve and represent our Lord. Let us seek grace to do it. We are not a part of the world system, in fact our interests are outside it. As Christians we have great interests, magnificent interests, though as yet invisible to mortal eyes, and with those interests we are identified.

If we keep clearly and constantly before us the fact that our citizenship — our life-associations — are in heaven, from whence we await the coming of the Saviour, we shall increasingly realize our separation from the world, and rejoice to serve our absent Lord.