

Toward a Biblical Theology of Worldliness

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The classic Christian expression of the believer's spiritual warfare speaks of the enemies of the Christian life as the devil, the flesh, and the world. These three enemies are so closely linked that theologians throughout the centuries refer to them as the "unholy trinity," or as C. H. Spurgeon refers to it, "that awful trinity of evil."¹ The world, the flesh, and the devil are commonly connected in theological works today, almost to the point of cliché.² Over the past century, however, the church and biblical scholarship have not given enough serious attention to one element of the unholy trinity: the world and, consequentially, worldliness.

In his encouragement for Wormwood to prevent his patient from realizing that his new pleasure is a temptation, Screwtape says, "Since the Enemy's servants have been preaching about 'the World' as one of the great standard temptations for two thousand years, this might seem difficult to do. But fortunately they have said very little about it for the last few decades."³ The church has continued to fail in emphasizing the dangers of the world sufficiently in recent years, and this neglect has led to an inadequate and erroneous understanding of the world.⁴

¹ "By Water and Blood," in *The Metropolitan Pulpit Sermons* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 57:257. References to the world, the flesh, and the devil abound in Spurgeon's sermons.

² This evil trinity first appears together in Paul's description of an unbelieving lifestyle in Ephesians 2:2–3. When believers had been dead in their sins, they were following "the course of this world" and "the prince of the power of the air" while living in the passions of their flesh. James may also connect the three, though less directly. James 3:15 contrasts wisdom that comes from above with wisdom that is "earthly, unspiritual, demonic." Extrabiblical References to this unholy trinity likely originate in the Middle Ages and become frequent after the Protestant Reformation. Randy Leedy traces the use of the trio back to Peter Abelard (12th century). *Love Not the World: Winning the War Against Worldliness* (Greenville: BJU Press, 2012), 62–63. Martin Luther seems to provide the earliest Protestant use of these three terms together as the enemy of believers. In a comment on Galatians 3:4, Luther speaks of "victory over the world, the flesh and the devil." *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, rev. ed. (1535; repr., London: James Clarke & Co, 1953), 214. The Second Helvetic Confession (1564) uses the phrase twice: "There is a Church militant on earth struggling against the flesh, the world, and the devil, and a Church triumphant in heaven rejoicing in the presence of the Lord" (p. 1:409). Also, "We are enrolled into the holy army of Christ to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil" (p. 1:414). Philip Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878). John Downname thoroughly discusses the subject in *The Christian Warfare Against the Devil, World and Flesh* (1634; repr., Vestavia Hills, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009). Jonathan Edwards solemnly dedicates himself to "fight with all my might against the world, the flesh, and the devil, to the end of my life." *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974), 1:xxv. References to the evil trinity increase significantly in the nineteenth century.

³ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 50.

⁴ James Davidson Hunter points out that "the words *worldly* and *worldliness* have, within a generation, lost most of their traditional meaning." *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 63. John MacArthur laments that "worldliness is rarely even mentioned today, much less identified for what it is." *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 31. R. Kent Hughes argues that "in contemporary evangelicalism there has been a deficiency of cultural awareness and a resulting lack of discernment regarding how the world has overwhelmed the thinking and behavior of Christians." *Set Apart: Calling a Worldly Church to a Godly Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 10. C. J. Mahaney argues that the church's neglect of the topic of the world continues and states that "the distinctions between Christian and worldly conduct—once so clear—have blurred beyond recognition." "Is This Verse in Your Bible?" in *Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 22; Russell Moore presents similar sentiments and points to the diametrically different views Christians hold regarding their relationship to the world

David F. Wells points out the failure of evangelicalism in recognizing worldliness, which “has concealed its values so adroitly in the abundance, the comfort, and the wizardry of our age that even those who call themselves the people of God seldom recognize them for what they are.”⁵ The evangelical church fails to recognize worldliness because it thinks of worldliness as a social rather than a theological reality: “Worldliness is so frequently being missed, or misjudged, in the evangelical church today: it takes theological sense, theological judgment to recognize it, and that is precisely what has disappeared from the church.”⁶ This failure to understand the theological reality of worldliness has resulted in an inability to see how this worldliness brings along with it the hidden baggage of “values that are hostile to the Christian faith.”⁷

Robert H. Gundry agrees with this assessment: “The sense of embattlement with the world is rapidly evaporating among many evangelicals.”⁸ Gundry argues that the greater evangelical participation in cultural endeavors, politics, and academics has resulted in a “blurring of the distinction between believers and the world.”⁹ This neglect of “sectarianism” in evangelicalism has resulted in a softening of difficult doctrines—such as the wrath of God, eternal punishment, and a shift from exclusivism to universalism—and the growth of the seeker-sensitive church movement, which “can easily sow the seeds of worldliness (broadly conceived).”¹⁰ Gundry calls evangelical leaders to “take a sectarian turn, a *return . . . to the fundamentalism of *The Fundamentals* and their authors at the very start of the twentieth century.*”¹¹

Though such evangelical leaders have been calling for holiness and for the church to be renewed in distinction from the world, the fact that such calls continue to be necessary implies that the problem continues to exist. One reason for this lack of attention to the world and the growing confusion about it is the “lack of theological development” on the topic.¹² Though many brief and specialized studies on various aspects of the world in the NT exist, a thorough biblical

and culture. *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 1–10. Rod Dreher argues that the church in America “has compromised so much with the world that it has been compromised in its faithfulness.” *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2018), 12.

⁵ *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 29. See also Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 11–12.

⁶ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸ *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian: A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Contemporary Evangelicalism, Especially Its Elites, in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 73.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75–78. Gundry clarifies, “By worldliness I mean not merely the disregard of fundamentalist taboos against smoking, drinking, dancing, movie-going, gambling and the like, but more expansively such matters as materialism, pleasure-seeking, indiscriminate enjoyment of salacious and violent entertainment, immodesty of dress, voyeurism, sexual laxity, and divorce” (p. 77).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 93. He explains further, “This new old fundamentalism . . . would be culturally engaged with the world enough to be critical rather than so culturally secluded as to be mute, morally separate from the world but not spatially cloistered from it, and unashamedly expressive of historic Christian essentials.”

¹² Leedy, 6. Similarly, Benjamin Edwards argues that the confusion on this issue “has arisen from a failure to properly define” the world. “Love Not the World: Keeping the Church and the World Distinct” (paper presented at the E3 Pastor’s Conference, DBTS, Allen Park, MI, Oct 20, 2016), 2, accessed March 29, 2017, http://e3pc.org/e3_pdfs/Edwards%20-%20Love%20not%20the%20world.pdf.

theological study of the world remains absent.¹³ Many NT theological works address the NT teaching on the world to some extent, particularly in Johannine literature. But such works do not synthesize the elements that contribute to an overarching biblical concept of the world.

Furthermore, the theological studies that do discuss “the world” provide definitions that are less than helpful for the church to use to identify worldliness. Most of these studies culminate with a definition along the lines of an “organized system of human civilization that is hostile to God,”¹⁴ or “society as alienated from God and under the sway of Satan.”¹⁵ These certainly are accurate definitions, but it is questionable whether they are helpful in understanding and identifying worldliness. Some of the practical works on worldliness are very helpful, but they do not provide a theological basis for the areas they identify as “worldly.”¹⁶

If the challenge being addressed is worldliness *in the church*, how many church-goers would readily admit that they are living lifestyles that are “alienated from God and under the sway of Satan” or that their lifestyle is representative of a lifestyle “hostile to God”? Many of the popular behaviors and philosophies of culture seem innocent enough, even if they are not explicitly scriptural. They certainly do not seem representative of a life “alienated from God” or part of a “system hostile to God.” John Frame—only slightly more helpfully—defines the world as “the bad part of culture.”¹⁷ This definition is not incorrect; but it is incomplete. It still omits any criteria for identifying what is the “bad part” of culture, and it limits “worldliness” to be only something that is part of culture. The impression is that worldliness is something that is entirely related to culture and is something that cannot exist apart from culture.

The goal of this paper is to make progress toward a biblical theological understanding of the world (in its evil sense) and a clearer understanding of worldliness. This is certainly not a full biblical theology of the world, nor does it seek to be a comprehensive survey of every passage that discusses the world or worldliness. In seeking a better biblical theological understanding of the world and worldliness, this paper will (1) discuss the root of the enmity that exists between church and world today and survey the development of this theme in Scripture. Then, this study will (2) examine several of the key statements of different NT authors regarding the world, identifying the key concepts related to the world. Finally, this study will (3) work to synthesize the various elements from those key passages.

¹³ Leedy comments, “What appears to remain lacking is reasonably well-developed biblical theology of the world and worldliness” (p. 6).

¹⁴ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1981), 132. For other examples, see Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 108; and Paul Ellingworth, “Translating *Kosmos* ‘World,’ in Paul,” *The Bible Translator* 53, no. 4 (Oct 2002): 415.

¹⁵ E.F. Harrison, “World,” in *EDT*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1297. For similar definitions, see D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 81; and Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 125–26. Cite more references.

¹⁶ For example, Hughes identifies 10 areas of worldliness for which the church must beware: materialism, hedonism, viewing sensuality, violence and voyeurism, sexual conduct, modesty, pluralism, marriage, church and the Lord’s day. His treatment of these issues is excellent, but he doesn’t present justification for choosing these areas. *Set Apart: Calling a Worldly Church to a Godly Life*. And in Mahaney’s *Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World*, the authors address four key areas (media, music, materialism, and clothes) without giving justification for why these four areas are chosen and any others are left out.

¹⁷ Frame elaborates, “It is the culture of unbelief, taken in its essence, without the effects of common grace and special grace.” *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 866. Frame’s discussion of the believer’s relationship to culture is quite helpful (pp. 853–908), but his definition of the world is over-simplified.

Origin of Enmity with the World in the Old Testament

Genesis 3:15 is the root of a biblical understanding of the world and worldliness: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” God placed enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman; that enmity would result in mutual, ongoing hostility between those who align themselves with the serpent and those who give allegiance to God. In order to prevent his impending defeat—or to merely cause great damage along the way—the serpent works to oppose the propagation and continuation of a righteous seed line descending from Eve, a line that descends through Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, and the nation of Israel in the OT. Genesis makes clear that the seed promise will be fulfilled through this particular line of descent.

Throughout Genesis and the rest of the OT, the serpent and pagan humanity seek to oppose the propagation of the seed line and its ability to fulfil the seed promise by (1) physically eliminating or subjugating the seed and (2) spiritually tempting the seed to give allegiance to the serpent rather than to God’s words. The entire OT narrative tells the story of Israel’s struggle to resist the hostility of the nations and the pressure to live and think like the nations.

Certain foundational ideas derived from Genesis 3:15 are critical for this discussion:

1. Enmity

The Hebrew word for enmity in Genesis 3:15 is אִיְבָרָה, which is used only four other times in the OT (Num. 35:21, 22; Ezek. 25:15; 35:5), in each case signifying “hostile intent, of such severity that it can lead to murder.”¹⁸ Expressions of enmity, however, are not limited merely to the use of these particular words. The promised enmity will consist of a battle for the allegiance of humans.

2. The Serpent

The serpent is not a mere animal. Though an exegetical examination of Genesis 3 by itself cannot conclude that the serpent is a personal “devil,” namely Satan, the fuller revelation of the NT clearly identifies this serpent as Satan (cf. Jn. 8:44; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 12:9; 20:2). The serpent himself was either Satan himself acting through a creature or Satan acting personally.¹⁹

3. The identity of the seed of the serpent

Interpreters generally agree that the seed of the serpent refers to humans who align themselves with Satan in opposition to God’s purposes. It is probable, though, that “seed of the

¹⁸ John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2003), 1:30.

¹⁹ Some argue that a literal serpent was not involved at all and that Satan was a serpent-like being. For example, Walter Kaiser argues that the designation “is probably a title, not the particular shape he assumed or the instrument he borrowed to manifest himself to the original pair.” *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, SOTBT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 38. Robert R. Gonzales identifies the being as “a serpent-like creature belonging to a higher order than the ordinary ‘beasts of the field.’” “Where Sin Abounds: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of the Spread of Sin and the Curse in the Book of Genesis with a Special Emphasis on the Patriarchal Narrative” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2008), 28. Michael S. Heiser refers to him as a supernatural being whose title is “the *nachash*.” *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), 87–91. Others argue that Satan was working in an actual literal serpent. For this view, see Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 146, 205–06; C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 171; Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 260–61.

serpent” can refer to both humans and demons who oppose God. Since 3:15 is *not* talking about physical descendants of the serpent and because it seems to be speaking of those who think and behave like the serpent in opposition to God (they are his seed because they are *like* him), it would seem appropriate to include as the “seed of the serpent” both demons and those humans who oppose God. Certainly, demonic beings are part of Satan’s kingdom that stands in opposition to God’s kingdom (Mt. 12:24–28). In this sense, the human race serves as the battleground on which and for which this war is fought.

4. The identity of the seed of the woman as both collective and individual

Interpreters generally recognize “seed” (זרע) as a collective noun. In this case, the collective seed of the woman refers to that portion of humanity that gives allegiance to God rather than the serpent. Alexander explains that 3:15 is “contrasting two types of creature: those who display a positive attitude towards God and those who are fundamentally opposed to him. Within the overall context of Genesis the ‘seed of the woman’ refers to those who are righteous, whereas the ‘seed of the serpent’ denotes those who are wicked.”²⁰

Some interpreters acknowledge that the seed of the woman also has a particular singular referent: an individual offspring of the woman.²¹ Genesis 3:15 uses the masculine singular pronoun הוּא to refer to the seed (זרע) of the woman and the masculine singular suffix with the verb שׁוּף to refer to the heel of the woman’s seed, “his heel.”²² Further support for this idea

²⁰ Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible’s Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver: Regent Publishing, 2003), 18. John H. Sailhamer agrees: “With the entry of sin into the world, the whole of humanity was divided into two peoples (seed), each locked in mortal combat with the other in an intense struggle of good and evil.” *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 587. See also Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 156; James Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *SBJT* 10 (June 2006): 33; and Waltke, *OTT*, 280–81.

²¹ Recent Evangelical scholarship has become increasingly receptive to an understanding of Genesis 3:15 as not only a promise of hope but also as the first messianic prophecy. In 1984, Claus Westermann stated that the most recent “weighty exegesis of Gen 3:15 as Protevangelium” was F. Delitzsch in 1890. *Genesis 1–11, CC* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 260. Westermann was likely correct. Since Westermann’s writing, however, numerous evangelical scholars, propelled particularly by the work of T. D. Alexander and C. John Collins, have engaged in “weighty exegesis” of 3:15 in support of the protevangelium (and messianic) view. See T. D. Alexander, “From Adam to Judah: The Significance of the Family Tree in Genesis,” *EQ* 61, no. 1 (1989): 15–17; and “Messianic Ideology in Genesis,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995), 27–32; Jack Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?” *TynBul* 48, no. 1 (1997): 139–48; T. D. Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” *TynBul* 48, no. 2 (1997): 363–67; Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 155–59. This shift in the interpretation of Genesis 3:15 is notable in the work of Victor P. Hamilton, who (in 1990) discusses the interpretation of 3:15 at length and hesitantly adheres to the concept of protevangelium. *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 199–200. He gives much stronger affirmation of the protevangelium, particularly its messianic significance, in a later writing (in 2005): “I believe that any reflection on Gen. 3:15 that fails to underscore the messianic emphasis of the verse is guilty of a serious exegetical error.” *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 46. For other noteworthy evangelical treatments of Genesis 3:15 supporting a messianic interpretation, see John L. Ronning, “The Curse on the Serpent (Genesis 3:15) in Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics,” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1997), 374–81; J. Hamilton, 30–54; Vern S. Poythress, “The Presence of God Qualifying Our Notions of Grammatical-Historical Interpretation: Genesis 3:15 as a Test Case,” *JETS* 50, no. 1 (March 2007): 87–103; and Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* NACSBT (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 129–145. The messianic view of 3:15 still is not unanimous among evangelicals. For example, see John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 225–26; 233–39.

²² After examining every use of זרע in the OT, Collins concludes, “When זרע denotes a specific descendant, it appears with singular verb inflections, adjectives, and pronouns. . . . We might wonder if the singular הוּא in Genesis 3:15 is used precisely in order to make it plain that an individual is being promised.” “A Syntactical

comes from Genesis 22:17, in which God tells Abraham, “Your offspring [עַרְוֵי] shall possess the gate of his [sing. pron.] enemies [אֹיְבֵי].” Collins concludes, “Thus we are entitled to join the Septuagint in seeing an individual as the referent here.”²³

Several arguments support the interpretation of both an individual and a collective sense, primarily because Scripture applies the concept in both ways. Genesis 3:15 looks forward to the establishment of a dynasty—a people who will devote themselves to God and a people from whom the Messiah would come. This dynasty will be at enmity with the serpent’s seed. The singular seed of the woman, though, will deliver the crushing blow to the head of the serpent (Heb. 2:14). The collective seed, on the other hand, may be seen as participating in this victory over the serpent by virtue of their connection to the Messiah (cf. Rom. 16:20). J. Hamilton concludes, “Is this seed of the woman to be understood as a particular person, or is it to be understood as a group of people? I will suggest that the texts indicate that the answer is ‘yes’ to both questions. The seed of the woman can be *both* a particular descendant *and* the group of descendants who hope for the victory of their seed.”²⁴

5. Mutual repeated strikes between the seeds and final victory for the woman’s seed

The same Hebrew verb (שָׁרַף) is used to describe the action that each seed inflicts on the other. The basic sense of the word is that of “attacking” or “striking at” rather than that of “bruising” (as in KJV, NASB, and ESV).²⁵ Also, both uses of the verb in 3:15 are imperfect, which could reflect an iterative sense, conveying the idea that these are repeated attacks.²⁶ The long-lasting duration of the serpent’s curse (“all the days of your life,” 3:14) implies that the enmity expresses itself on an ongoing basis. Though the sides express mutual enmity toward each other throughout history, the woman’s seed will achieve ultimate victory.²⁷

Note,” 144–145. Thus, Collins argues, “If the author had a specific offspring in view he would have used singular pronouns; and if he meant posterity in general, he would have used plural pronouns.” *Genesis 1–4*, 156. It is also worth pointing out that the LXX translates the Hebrew אָרַף with the Greek masculine singular αὐτός to refer to the neuter singular σπέρμα. See R. A. Martin, “The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *JBL* 84 (1965): 425–27.

²³ *Genesis 1–4*, 156.

²⁴ Hamilton, 31. For additional support of the individual and collective view, see Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC (Downers Grove: IVP, 1967), 1:75–76; Kaiser, 39; Alexander, “Messianic Ideology in Genesis,” 27–32; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 246; Waltke, *OTT*, 280–81; and Sailhamer, 588–90.

²⁵ The verb is used in only two other instances in the OT (Job 9:17; Ps. 139:11). The KJV, ESV, and NASB each translate שָׁרַף as “bruise” in both of its uses in 3:15. “Bruise,” though, is not the best translation of the word. “Bruising” should generally be thought of as the result of an attack, rather than the attack itself. Additionally, William David Reyburn and Euan McGregor Fry point out that the English word bruise “refers to causing a surface injury in which the skin or flesh is not broken, usually when struck by a blunt instrument.” *A Handbook on Genesis*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 92. Thus, “bruise” does not adequately convey שָׁרַף in any of its OT uses.

²⁶ For support, see Marten H. Woudstra, “Recent Translations of Genesis 3:15,” *CTJ* 6, no. 2 (1971): 202–03; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1987), 80; and Alexander, “Messianic Ideology,” 30.

²⁷ The idea of mutual repeated attacks raises the question of whether 3:15 foresees victory for one side over the other. Wenham argues that the fact that God is punishing the serpent in 3:15 (not the humans) implies that “something less than a draw would be expected” (p. 80). Additionally, from a canonical view, the victory of the Messiah comes by means of a death-blow (Heb. 2:14–15). Rydelnik argues that Hebrews 2:14–15 represents “an apparent midrash on Gen 3:15” (p. 141): “That through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.” Woudstra notes that though 3:15 “does not *explicitly* predict ultimate victory of the woman’s seed, nevertheless the One who set the enmity might also be regarded as *implicitly* guaranteeing the ultimate success of those who are on his side” (p. 203).

These key elements of Genesis 3:15 are manifest in the outworking of God’s redemptive plan throughout Scripture. Genesis begins developing the theme in the contrasting seed lines that derive from Cain and Seth (Gen. 4–5) and then through Ham, Shem, and Japheth (Gen. 6–11). The focus of the rest of Genesis—and the rest of the OT—is primarily on the development of one seed line descending from Abraham and its relationship to the surrounding nations. Genesis tells of the beginning of the development of enmity between these seed lines.

In Exodus, this promised seed line is in bondage under the oppression of the seed of the serpent, but God delivers them. During the Exodus, Yahweh makes a covenant with this seed line, providing them with “Israel’s mission statement.”²⁸ Yahweh is placing Israel in the midst of pagan nations, and his expectation for them is three-fold: they will be a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (Ex. 19:4–6). As a kingdom of priests, the nation is to minister to the other nations to teach them about Yahweh and his ways;²⁹ as a holy nation, Israel is to be distinct from these surrounding nations in their thinking and behavior.³⁰ The people must not behave as the Egyptians do or as the Canaanites do; rather, their behavior should be distinctive, following Yahweh’s rules (Lev. 18:3–4, 24–30). Yahweh detests the nations because of the customs that they engage in, so Israel must be holy (Lev. 20:23–25). Israel should not even be concerned to learn about the ways of the nations or how they worship (Deut. 18:9–14). God’s command to his people is clear: they are to be unapologetically distinct from the other nations in their worship and their behavior.

The rest of the OT tells the story of Israel’s struggle to survive physically and spiritually while surrounded by pagan nations. The pagan nations, representative of the seed of the serpent and under the influence of false demonic gods, seek to eliminate or subjugate Israel. Israel, on the other hand, is enamored by the idolatry and sensual ways of the nations, ultimately experiencing judgment because of their rejection of God’s command to be distinctive. The pattern of OT Israel becomes the paradigm for the church’s relationship to the unbelieving world.

²⁸ W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 87.

²⁹ Christopher J. Wright points out that “just as the call of Abraham is explicitly for the benefit of the nations, so the choice of Israel for a special relationship with God is likewise made with the rest of the world clearly in view.” *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 256. Also, Paul R. Williamson comments, “The whole nation has thus inherited the responsibility formerly conferred upon Abraham—that of mediating God’s blessing to the nations of the earth.” *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 97. For a thorough discussion of various views of the meaning of “kingdom of priests” and an alternative view, see John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19:6*, JSOT Supplement Series (London: T&T Clark, 2004). Davies concludes that the phrase indicates that Israel as a nation will have access to Yahweh’s presence (p. 98)..

³⁰ Most interpreters agree that the concept of “separateness” is fundamental to the meaning of holiness, or at least a “necessary consequence.” Jackie A. Naudé, “קִדְּשׁ,” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:879. For this sense, see also Durham, 263; H. P. Müller, “קִדְּשׁ” in *TLOT*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 1104; D. G. Peterson, “Holiness,” in *NDBT*, ed. T. D. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 550; Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2000), 46–47; T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 208–213; Merrill, 271; Blackburn, 95. Peter J. Gentry presents an alternative (and problematic) view, arguing that the “basic meaning of the word [קִדְּשׁ] is ‘consecrated’ or ‘devoted,’” rather than that of separateness or moral purity. “The Meaning of ‘Holy’ in the Old Testament,” *BibSac* 170 (2013): 417.

The Outworking of Enmity with the World in the New Testament

The Gospels demonstrate that from the time of Jesus' birth and during Jesus' ministry, the rulers of the nations, the Jewish religious leaders, and the mass of humanity in general exercise opposition to Jesus. As Jesus begins to establish his dominion in the form of the kingdom of God, the human agents of Satan relentlessly seek to destroy him. Throughout Jesus' life, all levels of humanity—political leaders (Mt. 2:19–23; Lk. 13:31–32), religious leaders (Mt. 12:38–39; 26:3–4; Mk. 3:6; Lk. 11:53–54; Jn. 5:16; 7:30–44; 11:47–53), and the masses (Lk. 4:16–30; 17:25; 23:13–23; Jn. 1:11; Acts 3:14–15)—oppose him to some degree. Political leaders plot to kill him, the religious leaders seek to subvert his influence and destroy him, and the crowds reject him as their Messiah. These groups display their opposition to Jesus in their failure to believe in him and ultimately, in their desire to kill him, a desire which they carry out. Jesus points out that Satan is the driving force behind this human opposition to Jesus (Mt. 12:25–26; 16:21–23; Lk. 22:3–6, 53; Jn. 13:2, 27), and he identifies his opponents as children of the devil (Jn. 8:44). Satan works to oppose God's redemptive plan through his efforts to achieve Jesus' spiritual downfall (Mt. 4:1–12; Lk. 4:1–13) and to put him to death. Jesus, however, overcomes the enmity of the serpent's seed and fulfils the intention for his earthly ministry as part of God's redemptive plan (Heb. 2:14–15; 1 Jn. 3:8).

John describes this opposition to Jesus and disciples as representative of the “world.” Because Satan is the ruler of this world (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and the world hates Jesus (7:7; 15:18–19, 23), the world also hates believers (15:18–19; 1 Jn. 3:13). D. A. Carson explains that Jesus' not being “of this world” emphasizes that he and his opponents “emerge from two entirely antithetical realms.”³¹ Carson explains further that this contrast is “between the realm of God himself and the realm of his fallen and rebellious creation, the ‘world’ which hates Jesus because he testifies that ‘what it does is evil’ (7:7).”³²

Though John speaks of the world using different terminology and emphases than the Synoptics do, they agree in their assessment of the enmity between the world and believers. Instead of primarily using κόσμος to identify the world,³³ the Synoptics recount examples of the hostility toward Jesus, and they sometimes refer to the opposition to Jesus as coming from “the nations.” Michael F. Bird argues that in the Gospels ἔθνη and κόσμος “stand in opposition to the gospel and represent hostility to the divine order and the divine emissaries.”³⁴ A comparison of Matthew's use of ἔθνη and John's use of κόσμος indicates that the usage of the terms overlaps. This demonstrates that Matthew is likely speaking of “the nations/the Gentiles” in terms consistent with the OT (Israel and the nations), whereas John has shifted the terminology to speak of the world (the church and the world).³⁵ Table 1 displays the similarities in Matthew's use of ἔθνη with John's use of κόσμος:

³¹ *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 342.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ John's Gospel uses κόσμος 78 times, compared to a total of 14 uses of κόσμος in the Synoptics combined (8 in Matthew; 3 in Mark; 3 in Luke).

³⁴ “Tearing the Heavens and Shaking the Heavens: Mark's Cosmology in Its Apocalyptic Context,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean T. McDonough (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 48–49.

³⁵ Leedy helpfully explains the shift in terminology from ἔθνη to κόσμος in the NT. The OT spoke in terms of national identity, but the gospel in the NT is specifically for all nations (Mt. 28:19). As the gospel spread through the Gentile world it became inappropriate to speak of a distinction between Israel and the nations/Gentiles. See discussion of this development in Leedy, 38–44. Additionally, the Synoptic Gospels were written much earlier than John's Gospel, so John displays the fullest development of a distinction between church and world rather than Israel and the nations.

Table 1. κόσμος in John and ἔθνη in Matthew

Description	Matthew - ἔθνη	John – κόσμος
Object of Christ's mission	4:15; 12:18,21	1:9; 3:17,19; 9:5; 12:46; 17:11
Rejects Christ	20:19	1:10; 7:7; 15:18, 24
Rejects believers	24:9	15:18-19
Distinct from God's people	10:5,18	14:17,19,22; 17:6,9,16,25
Distinct behavior as sinners	6:32; 20:25	14:27; 16:8,20
Object of mission of believers	24:14; 28:19	17:18-23
Object of impending judgment	25:32	9:39; 12:31; 16:8,11

This enmity between the church and the world continues with the experience of the early church in Acts and will continue until the end times. Acts provides several examples of political leaders opposing God's people and the advance of the gospel, including persecution against Peter and John (Acts 4:1–22; 5:17–46; 12:3–5), James (12:1–2), and Paul (21:33–36; 22:33–34; 23:2–5; 24:1–8, 27; 25:2–23). Jewish religious leaders present fierce opposition to the advance of the gospel, engaging in vigorous opposition to Stephen (Acts 6:8–15; 7:54–60) and Paul (8:1–3; 9:1–2; 21:27; 24:9; 25:2–23). Gentiles sometimes work with Jews in opposition to the gospel (14:5–7; 17:5–9). In spite of the constant opposition to the church, the church perseveres and continues to increase (5:38–42; 6:1; 8:1–4; 12:24). This opposition from the world against believers culminates in the persecution of God's people in the end times (Rev. 12–13).

The Apostolic Explanation of the World

The Gospels and Acts present the story of the church's existence and progress in the midst of a hostile world. The authors of the NT letters provide a fuller exposition of the theological basis for such hostility and the necessary posture of the church toward the world. This section will examine key statements in the letters of Paul, James, Peter, and John regarding the world and worldliness.³⁶

Paul

Paul's concept of the world is thorough and complex. Paul definitively presents Satan as the "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4), the chief enemy of the church (Eph. 6:12), and he encourages believers to be diligent in their struggle against Satan (Eph. 6:11). Paul uses two key terms to refer to the world. Paul uses αἰών primarily to refer to the arena over which Satan exercises influence. The basic sense of αἰών refers to a long period of time (Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:26), but among NT writers, Paul is almost entirely unique in his negative description of this present αἰών as categorically evil (Eph. 2:2; 2 Tim. 4:10).³⁷ Through his death, Christ has rescued believers from this "present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). Thus, the present evil age "is no longer the real world for believers. To this extent the original strict temporal distinction between the two aeons is overcome."³⁸

³⁶ The authors of Hebrews and Jude do speak of related themes, but they do not present assertions about the world or worldliness in the way the writers of the other epistles do.

³⁷ Jesus also speaks of "the cares of this age" (Mt. 13:22; Mk. 4:19), but this does not specifically identify this age as categorically evil. In Luke 16:8, Jesus contrasts the shrewdness of "the sons of this age" with "the sons of light," likely using the same sense Paul uses in identifying this present age as evil. For studies of Paul's use of αἰών, see H. Sasse, "αἰών," in *TDNT*, 1:203–07; T. Holtz, "αἰών," in *EDNT*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 1:45–46; and Silva, ed., "αἰών," in *NIDNTTE*, 1:197–200.

³⁸ Holtz, 1:46.

Paul uses κόσμος, on the other hand, to refer to either the created world in a geographical sense (e.g., Rom. 1:8, 20; Eph. 1:4) or the mass of humanity in the world (Rom. 3:19).³⁹ Related to the latter sense, κόσμος can also carry a pejorative overtone in reference to unbelieving humanity and its thought/behavior patterns (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:21; 3:19). After surveying all of Paul's uses of κόσμος, Adams asserts that "Paul's predominant style of usage [of κόσμος] is negative. Pejorative references outnumber neutral and positive ones by two to one."⁴⁰ In Paul's writings some overlap exists in the use of αἰών and κόσμος, but they are not exact synonyms. Leedy helpfully notes,

Thus, *aion* never signifies the mass of humanity, and *kosmos* never means an extremely long period of time. When the words are used with reference to unregenerate humanity in its rejection of God, though, very little difference of meaning is apparent. *Kosmos* is more likely to be used when the focus is on geography or humanity; *aion* is more likely to be used when the focus is on the present period of time.⁴¹

Key Passage: Ephesians 2:1–3

Ephesians 2:1–3 may be identified as a paradigm for Paul's concept of the world because of (1) its use of both of Paul's key terms for world, (2) its delineation of Satan's role as ruler in the world and (3) the distinctive characteristics of those who live under Satan's influence (the seed of the serpent), particularly in contrast to (4) those who had been brought from death to life (the seed of the woman). Paul presents Satan as the enemy of the church in his influence over unbelievers.

In Ephesians 2:2, Paul describes Satan's influence over the unbelievers who follow "the course of this world" (literally, "the age of this world," τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου), a phrase using both of Paul's key terms referring to "the world." The syntax in this phrase is difficult, and interpreters express various views on the relationship of αἰών and κόσμος, with most commentators seeing the genitive use as apposition, whereby Paul views the terms as basically synonymous.⁴² The idea is probably appositional, though since the terms are not exact synonyms,

³⁹ Paul uses κόσμος 47 times, 21 of which are in 1 Corinthians (45%), 9 are in Romans (19%), and the remaining 17 are scattered throughout his other letters. Edward Adams posits that "Paul uses the term κόσμος in a remarkably complex, varied and subtle way, to an extent which has seldom been appreciated by scholars. The range of senses, nuances and associations with which Paul employs the word cannot be captured in a single, all-encompassing theological definition." *Constructing the World: A Study of Paul's Cosmological Language* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 242. For studies of κόσμος in Pauline literature, see Ellingworth, 414–21; Adams, 12–21; 41–76; 105–90; 221–36; Joel White, "Paul's Cosmology: The Witness of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians," in *Cosmology and NTT*, 90–106; Robert L. Foster, "Reoriented to the Cosmos: Cosmology & Theology in Ephesians through Philemon," in *Cosmology and NTT*, 107–24. For studies of κόσμος in the NT, see Sasse, "κόσμος," in *TDNT*, 3:883–95; Robert G. Bratcher, "The Meaning of *Kosmos*, 'World,' in the NT," *The Bible Translator* 31, no. 4 (Oct 1980): 430–34; Balz, "κόσμος," in *EDNT*, 2:309–13; Silva, ed., "κόσμος," in *NIDNTE*, 2:733–36;

⁴⁰ *Constructing the World*, 242. This count includes references in which κόσμος itself may refer to the created universe or humanity in general, but its use in context is pejorative. For example, Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 5:10 refers to "the immoral ones of this world." Though the sense of κόσμος likely refers to the earth, the implication of the context is that the κόσμος is full of immoral people.

⁴¹ *Love Not the World*, 47.

⁴² Clinton E. Arnold argues that the genitive construction is a genitive of apposition, since the terms are "near equivalents." *Ephesians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 131. Most commentators seem to follow this line of thinking and refer to this as the "world-age," and the terms are close enough synonyms to agree that an appositional use of the genitive is present. Andrew T. Lincoln points out that this fits with other examples in Ephesians in which Paul is "piling up . . . synonyms in genitive constructions," as in 1:5, 11, 19, and others. *Ephesians*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1990), 95. It is also possible that the genitive construction conveys more than just

the words may be used together here to demonstrate the interconnectedness of κόσμος and αἰών—this evil world system (κόσμος) presently at work during this evil age on earth (αἰών). Lincoln explains that this phrase may be “a way of talking about both spatial and temporal aspects of fallen human existence.”⁴³ This verse demonstrates Satan’s role in the affairs of the world in this age in his efforts to thwart God’s plan for humanity.

Ephesians 2:2–3 describes Satan’s work in the “sons of disobedience,” operating [ἐνεργέω] in them to follow after (κατά) the “course of this world” and after (κατά) “the prince of the power of the air.”⁴⁴ Paul here is saying that these people are to some degree under the devil’s control. Arnold summarizes: “The devil is thus seen to exercise effective and compelling power in his work of inspiring disobedience among humanity.”⁴⁵ Prior to salvation, believers had also lived in the same way—“in the passions of their flesh” (2:3). Believers had previously existed as seed of the serpent, living under the influence of Satan and his demonic forces among the “sons of disobedience.”

Paul describes the outworking of life under the influence of Satan—the life “according to the age of this world”—as living in the “passions of our flesh” (2:3). Paul occasionally uses the word “passions” (ἐπιθυμία) in a positive way (Phil. 1:23), but most often he uses it negatively (e.g., Eph. 4:22), particularly in relation to σάρξ (cf. Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16). The phrase “passions of the flesh” refers to the sinful desires exercised by the flesh. The sense of “flesh” (σάρξ) in its particular Pauline usage denotes “that self-regarding element in human nature which has been corrupted at the source, characterized by appetites and propensities, which, if unchecked, produce ‘the works of the flesh’ listed in Gal. 5:19–20.”⁴⁶ These are the sinful passions that Satan works to arouse and exploit in men. Paul does not teach that the actions of

aposition and could perhaps convey an attributive use, which carries the sense “this worldly age.” Harold W. Hoehner argues that the genitive use is descriptive, referring to “the era characterized by this ungodly world in contrast to the age to come.” *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 310.

⁴³ Lincoln elaborates, “Instead of being oriented to the life of the age to come and the heavenly realm, the past lives of the readers had been dominated by this present evil age and this world. Their sinful activities were simply in line with the norms and values of a spatio-temporal complex wholly hostile to God” (p. 95).

⁴⁴ Arnold notes that the use of the preposition κατά here “goes beyond the idea of conformity to a norm, especially in relationship to the second phrase, which speaks of the influence of the devil.” *Ephesians*, 130.

⁴⁵ *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 61. Arnold argues that the correct translation of (ἐνεργοῦντος) here is “powerfully working.” He explains that ἐνεργέω “is a power-denoting term that implies more than the idea of simply ‘working in’ (e.g., ποιῶν ἐν), especially in this context.” Arnold refers to the use of the word in “a Jewish text describing the influence of evil spirits on people: ‘As you forsake the Lord, you will live in every evil deed ... and the spirits of deception will be powerfully working (ἐνεργοῦντων) in you to accomplish every evil act’ (*T. Dan* 5:5; translation mine).” *Ephesians*, 132. Peter T. O’Brien points out that ἐνεργέω “always denotes supernatural power in the New Testament.” *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 161.

⁴⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 283–84. O’Brien adds, “In this context flesh does not stand for a person’s physical existence, but humanity in its sinfulness and rebellion against God. It is the sphere in which a person is unable to please him (Rom. 8:8). The passions of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:16, 24) in which those outside of Christ had once *lived* are not to be thought of simply as sexual or carnal appetites. They include anger, envy, rage, dissensions, and selfish ambition as well (Gal. 5:20).” *Ephesians*, 162. For studies of Paul’s concept of “flesh,” see Schweizer, “σάρξ,” in *TDNT*, 7:125–38; Bratcher, “The Meaning of Sarx (‘Flesh’) in Paul’s Letters,” *The Bible Translator* 29 (1978): 212–18; Ceslas Spicq, *TLNT*, trans. James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 3:235–39; R. J. Erickson, “Flesh,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 303–06; Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 140–46. Silva, ed., “σάρξ,” in *NIDNTTE*, 4:255–59.

the flesh always coincide with temptation from Satan and his forces.⁴⁷ Rather, the role of Satan is to arouse and exploit these desires rather than to create the desires. The desires of the flesh are already present in fallen humanity.

Living in the “passions of the flesh” manifests itself not merely in illicit desires but also in acting upon those desires: “indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (2:3, NASB).⁴⁸ The term translated “desires” (θέλημα) is usually a neutral term referring to human desires, but its “link to both ἐπιθυμία and σάρξ gives it a clearly negative connotation” here.⁴⁹ The genitives “of the flesh and of the mind” (NASB) are subjective genitives, meaning that people do what their flesh and their mind desire. Not only are their inclinations evil, but their thoughts are evil. The “mind” (διάνοια) refers to the “ability to think” and the “faculty of knowledge, understanding.”⁵⁰ Paul here identifies the mind as a primary object which Satan desires to control.⁵¹

Thus, “living in the passions of the flesh” and “carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the mind” are parallel to “following the course of this world” and “the prince of the power of the air.” The “sons of disobedience”—the seed of the serpent—live in this way.⁵² They are dead in sin; their thoughts, desires, and actions are corrupt. These are the characteristics of the “age of this world” (Eph. 2:2).

Paul also describes the lifestyle that follows the course of this world as walking “as the Gentiles [τὰ ἔθνη] do” (Eph. 4:17). Paul refers to “the Gentiles” using “spiritual rather than racial terminology,”⁵³ and the ensuing descriptions refer to “the non-Christian Gentiles’ fundamental and comprehensive alienation from God in a manner that recalls 2:1–5.”⁵⁴ Key words and concepts in 4:17–24 repeat the concepts in 2:1–3. Both passages speak of the pre-conversion (ποτέ in 2:2–3; μηκέτι in 4:17) lifestyle as a “walk” (περιπατέω in 2:2, 4:17). Both passages refer

⁴⁷ Contrary to Arnold, who argues that neither “flesh” nor the “powers” are solely responsible for human sin. Instead, Paul “sees the two influences as *complementary*. They both work together to lead individuals into sin, transgression, and disobedience.” *Power and Magic*, 62. Arnold does helpfully point out that Paul’s emphasis on the “powers” in Ephesians is particularly noteworthy for believers in Ephesus, a place prominent for its demonic activity and magical practices (pp. 13–40).

⁴⁸ Hoehner points out that the dual use of σάρξ “is not a needless repetition, for it is one thing for the flesh to have desires but another to act on those desires.” The present tense demonstrates that these are actions that regularly occur” (pp. 320–21). The ESV translates this reference to σάρξ as “body,” but there is no need to switch from the sense of σάρξ used in the previous verse.

⁴⁹ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 126.

⁵⁰ Hoehner argues that Paul’s use of διάνοια “mind” here “is parallel to the OT idea of the heart, inner person, or the thoughts of the heart” (p. 321). Silva points out that the LXX uses διάνοια 70 times, most frequently translating לֵב/לִבָּ. “It can be used in constructions that express emotions and acts of will (Exod 35:22; Isa 35:4), but it can also denote the whole of the inner life (Gen 8:21).” “ναός,” in *NIDNTTE*, 3:428. Lincoln notes that “διάνοια, ‘thinking, mind,’ is often interchangeable with καρδία, ‘heart,’ in the LXX for the center of human perception and is found as a translation of the Hebrew where one might have expected the latter (cf., e.g., Gen 8:21; 17:17; 24:45; 27:41; Exod 28:3)” (p. 277). See also Behm, “διάνοια,” in *TDNT*, 4:965.

⁵¹ See also Ephesians 4:17, where Paul says, “You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.” This darkening of the mind leads to a life of sensuality and impurity (4:19).

⁵² Thielman says, “The whole package—flesh and mind, deeds and thoughts—placed everyone squarely among the ‘sons of disobedience.’” *Ephesians*, 127.

⁵³ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP, 1989), 133.

⁵⁴ Stephen E. Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 145.

to the sinful state of the mind (διάνοια in 2:3, 4:18) and how this mindset works itself out through lusts (ἐπιθυμία in 2:3, 4:22).⁵⁵ In Ephesians 2:2, this sinful behavioral lifestyle is characteristic of the “world” (κόσμος) and in Ephesians 4, this behavior is characteristic of the “Gentiles” (τὰ ἔθνη). This provides a key theological link between “the nations” in the OT and “the world” in the NT. For Paul, then, following the course of this world (i.e., “worldliness”) includes living according to the passions of the flesh and the futility of the mind, and following the patterns of behavior exemplified by unbelievers. Satan works in unbelievers to entice men to exercise their passions and lusts and to ground their behavior in the futility of their minds, and he tempts believers to do the same.

Other Pauline Passages

Paul discusses the world in numerous other references. Some of the key references include his command in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world [αἰών].” Throughout 1 Corinthians 1–2 Paul contrasts the wisdom of this world (αἰών in 1:20, 2:6–8; κόσμος in 1:20–21, 27–28; 2:12) with divine wisdom. In salvation, Christ gave himself for us, “so that he might rescue us from this present evil age [αἰών]” (Gal. 1:4). Demas deserted Paul because he “loved this present age [αἰών]” (2 Tim. 4:10). Paul explains in Titus 2:12 the need to “renounce worldly [κοσμικός] lusts” and to “live godly lives in this present age [αἰών].” These passages are highly relevant for a biblical theology of the world, but Ephesians 2:1–3 seems to be Paul’s most complete statement of his understanding of the world.

James

James presents one of the key statements in the NT regarding the world. It could even be argued that “enmity with the world” represents the “thematic center” for James’s theology, demonstrated in James’s “ethical and religious dualism.”⁵⁶ Darian Lockett argues that “James charts the universe via two competing world views, or systems of value, which order cosmological and theological order. . . . Not only are these systems of measure set in opposition, but ‘the world’ is expressly marked off as contagious territory—polluting ground (1:27).”⁵⁷ James consistently refers to what is worldly or earthly to “refer to the world as a counter measure of order over against the order of God.”⁵⁸

The serpent certainly plays a role in working against the spiritual welfare of believers, who are engaged in warfare with the devil and must resist him (Jas. 4:7). James contrasts wisdom that comes from above (i.e., from God)⁵⁹ with wisdom that is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic”

⁵⁵ For support of the connection between these passages, see Arnold, *Ephesians*, 281; Lincoln, 98; Foulkes, 133; Fowl, 145; and A. Skevington Wood, “Ephesians,” in *EBC*, 11:61.

⁵⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson argues that the “enmity” described in James 4:4 “offers us the best hope of finding a thematic center for [James’s] ethical and religious dualism. Indeed, 4:4 might be taken as thematic for the composition as a whole.” *The Letter of James*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 84. See also Darian Lockett, “God and ‘the World’: Cosmology and Theology in the Letter of James,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, 144–51; and Craig L. Blomberg and Marian J. Kamell, *James*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 190. This is not a consensus view, though. For example, Andrew Chester and Ralph P. Martin reference James 4:4 only one time and do not discuss the verse. *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 18. Likewise, Peter H. Davids mentions James 4:4 only two times, commenting on the verse only briefly. *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, BTNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 73, 81.

⁵⁷ Lockett, 155–56.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 151–54; see also John Painter and David A. deSilva, *James and Jude*, PCNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 131.

(3:15). Earthly wisdom “denotes not only what is inferior to the heavenly, but also that which is in opposition to the heavenly.”⁶⁰ The demonic nature of this wisdom indicates that it is “instigated by demons and the unwholesome spiritual world.”⁶¹ James distinguishes between the product of these different types of wisdom: earthly wisdom produces jealousy and selfish ambition, and wisdom from above produces morally pure results (3:15–18).⁶² This identification of earthly wisdom as demonic aligns it with the seed of the serpent.

The church’s enmity with the seed of the serpent requires the church to remain pure. James identifies the responsibility to keep oneself unstained from the world as a key element of “pure and undefiled” religion (Jas. 1:27). Remaining unstained from the world requires believers to “maintain a particular boundary between themselves and the influences of ‘the world.’”⁶³ The world is “the agent of pollution” that “transmits a counter form of ‘religion’” that contaminates believers.⁶⁴

James addresses his readers as “adulterous people,” employing an OT metaphor describing Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh.⁶⁵ The concept of adultery probably stems from the references to the “passions” (ἡδονή) that are at war within them (Jas. 4:1, 3).⁶⁶ By seeking a friendship with the world—God’s enemy—the readers were following in the pattern of OT Israel who venerated the idols and the culture of the nations. By even “desiring” (βούλομαι) to befriend the world, they commit spiritual adultery. Raymond C. Ortlund notes, “It is merely the *desire* for friendship with the world—not total immersion in it, or complete identification with it, but merely the wish to be on good terms—which draws a frown from God.”⁶⁷

The reference to “world” (κόσμος) here (as in 1:27) cannot refer to the mass of humanity in general or to the evil people of the world but rather to the way of life in which unbelievers characteristically engage.⁶⁸ In keeping with the recurring theme in the letter, the reference to

⁶⁰ Lockett, 150.

⁶¹ David P. Nystrom, *James*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 208.

⁶² For a helpful discussion of the wisdom theme in James, see Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 75–77.

⁶³ Lockett, 146.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Douglas J. Moo notes how striking this label is after so many vocatives referring to the readers as “brothers” (1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12). *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 186. Most commentators agree that the reference to “adulteresses” is an allusion to the OT symbolism for Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Moo provides abundant evidence and support for this idea (pp. 186–87). John J. Schmitt summarizes arguments for six different possible sources for the term and concludes on insufficient grounds that it is a direct reference to Proverbs 30:20. “You Adulteresses! The Image in James 4:4,” *NT* 28, no. 4 (1986): 327–37.

⁶⁶ For this connection, see I-Jin Loh and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Letter from James*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: UBS, 1997), 141. Moo notes that ἡδονή “means simply ‘pleasure,’ but often with the connotation of a sinful, self-indulgent pleasure (we get our word ‘hedonism’ from it). It consistently has this negative meaning in the NT (Luke 8:14; Tit. 3:3; 2 Pet. 2:13).” When James refers to these passions waging “war in your members” (4:1, NASB), he is likely referring to “members” as parts of the human body. *James*, 181. See also Kurt A. Richardson, who identifies this as a reference to “physical feelings associated with the bodily appetites.” *James*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1997), 173.

⁶⁷ *God’s Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery*, NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 142.

⁶⁸ Commentators generally agree on this sense of κόσμος. Dan G. McCartney defines “world” here as “the ethos of life in opposition to, or disregard of, God and his kingdom.” *James*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 209. Blomberg and Kamell identify the sense of the world here as “the fallen world system and

friendship of the world relates to behaviors and lifestyle. James is urging the people to adopt a lifestyle distinct from the “world.” Johnson points out that “friendship” (φιλία) involves “‘sharing all things’ in a unity both spiritual and physical.”⁶⁹ When a person engages in this type of close bond with God’s enemy, he positions himself (καθίστημι) as an enemy of God.⁷⁰

God and the world are at enmity. Thus, the enmity between the seeds mandates a choice on the part of the believer either to give allegiance to God or to align with the world in opposition to God’s purposes. It is at this point that James may evidence a direct conceptual connection with Genesis 3:15. The question at issue in 4:4 is *with whom* the believers are at enmity. James assumes that believers are supposed to be God’s “friends,” which would place them at enmity with the seed of the serpent (the world), the “spiritual force behind ‘the world.’”⁷¹ James leaves no room for neutral ground in either direction here. This concept reflects the pattern of Genesis 3:15, and James uses the exact word the LXX uses in Genesis 3:15 for enmity (ἔχθρα). This connection seems at least possible, particularly if 4:4 is the center of the theology of James, representing an “ethical and religious dualism.”⁷² Passages immediately before (demonic wisdom in 3:15) and after (resisting the devil in 4:7) refer to the serpent and his seed in their role as the evil enemies of the divine will. Though this is not conclusive, it is quite possible then that in 4:4, James is alluding to Genesis 3:15.⁷³

For James, then, a friendship with the world identifies a person as an enemy of God (4:4). James describes such people as “adulterous” people (4:4) who live after their “passions” (ἡδονή in 4:1, 3). James goes even further than simply prohibiting a friendship with the world; he denounces “whoever wishes to be a friend of the world” as an enemy of God (4:4). These characteristics evidence the spiritual war within the individuals (4:1)—the same individuals whom James exhorts to resist the devil (4:7).

Peter

Peter presents the devil as the believer’s “adversary” who “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan’s identification as the “adversary” (Gk. ἀντίδικος) demonstrates his opposition to the church.⁷⁴ Peter describes the adversary as a

values of the unregenerate” (p. 190). Loh and Hatton refer to the world as “corrupted human standards, judgments, and values as against those of God” (p. 141).

⁶⁹ James, 279. See also Moo, *James*, 187.

⁷⁰ Throughout the NT καθίστημι consistently means “to appoint” or “to authorize” (Mt. 24:45, 47; Lk. 12:14; Acts 6:3; 7:10, 27; Tit. 1:5). Silva confirms that Greek and Jewish literature use καθίστημι primarily in this sense as well. “καθίστημι,” in *NIDNTTE* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 2:579. Moo points out that the readers are likely not “overtly disclaiming God and consciously deciding to follow the world instead. But their tendency to imitate the world by discriminating against people (2:1–13), by speaking negatively of others (3:1–12), by exhibiting ‘bitter envy’ and ‘selfish ambition’ (3:13–18), and by pursuing their own destructive pleasures (4:1–3) amounted to just that.” *James*, 187.

⁷¹ Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 81.

⁷² Johnson, 84.

⁷³ The idea for an allusion to Genesis 3:15 in James 4:4 seems to be original here and has not been considered in scholarly discussion. Hilary of Arles may have this connection to Genesis 3 in mind in his comments on 4:4. He speaks of a “love of honor and pride and boastfulness” as the “undoing of the fallen angels as well as of the first human couple, which is why to this day they are described as ‘enemies of God.’” *James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude*, ACCS, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 47.

⁷⁴ The English word “adversary” (in most translations) calls to mind the Hebrew אָדָוֶרֶשׁ (“adversary”), which the LXX translates as διάβολος when referring to the personal devil (Job 1:7–2:2; 1 Chr. 21:1; Zech. 3:1–2). The NT use of ἀντίδικος (used 5 times) usually refers to a legal opponent (Mt. 5:25; Lk. 12:58) but can refer to an opponent

“roaring lion,” emphasizing the ferocity of the foe.⁷⁵ In images from the first century, “the lion is often represented as fiercely attacking other animals or as battling a human hunter.”⁷⁶ The roaring of the lion implies auditory and visual images of aggression and hostility.⁷⁷ The lion’s prowling likely alludes to Satan’s descriptions of his activities in Job 1:7: “going to and fro on the earth” and “walking up and down on it.” The devil’s intent is to seek people to devour, primarily in reference to spiritual rather than physical welfare. Michaels points out that the persecution referenced in 1 Peter is part of “a universal conflict between the devil and the people of God, with the whole world as its arena.”⁷⁸ Peter points out how the persecution endured by his hearers is a result of the ongoing enmity between the serpent’s seed and believers.⁷⁹

Peter wants the believers to honor God through their fiery trials, and his exhortation for overcoming in the face of this enmity is grounded in God’s intention for them as specified in their identity as believers.⁸⁰ Peter tells them that they are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (2:9), language that certainly alludes to Exodus

in general (Lk. 18:3). Uses of ἀντίδικος in the LXX refer primarily to hostile enemies with intent to kill and whom God will judge (1 Sam. 2:10; Est. 8:11; Jer. 27:34), though a legal element is sometimes present (Prov. 18:17).

⁷⁵ Peter may be alluding to OT passages that refer to the enemies of God’s people as lions (e.g., Ps. 22:13; 35:17; Amos 3:4). Davids says that the lion metaphor “is surely drawn from Ps. 22:13.” *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 190–91. See also J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 1969), 210; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1988), 298; and Christopher Byrley, “Persecution and the ‘Adversary’ of 1 Peter 5:8,” *SBJT* 21, no. 3 (2017): 93–94. However, the OT also uses other animals (e.g., bulls, dogs) to make this comparison. It is more likely that Peter used the lion metaphor because of its reputation in the setting of his readers. David G. Horrell, Bradley Arnold, Travis B. Williams argue cogently that the description of the devil as a lion would have “called to mind the wild animal fights and *ad bestias* executions that took place in the Roman arenas and theaters across Asia Minor” (p. 697). During this period, lions are closely connected to “games and executions” (p. 708), and victims rarely survive lion attacks (p. 709). “Visuality, Vivid Description, and the Message of 1 Peter: The Significance of the Roaring Lion (1 Peter 5:8),” *JBL* 132, no. 3 (2013): 697. Boris A. Paschke agrees and asserts that the lion “was the *ad bestias* animal par excellence” (p. 494). “The Roman *ad bestias* Execution as a Possible Historical Background for 1 Peter 5.8,” *JSNT* 28, no. 4 (2006): 489–500.

⁷⁶ Horrell, Arnold, and Williams, 707.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 703.

⁷⁸ Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene A. Nida point out that in the context of 1 Peter this “refers to the activity of the Devil in trying to destroy believers, particularly their faith, and lead them into apostasy, that is, to deny their faith in Jesus Christ. Implied in all these is the thought that the sufferings experienced by Christians are not simply the work of people, but are instigated by the Devil himself.” *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: UBS, 1980), 168.

⁷⁹ *1 Peter*, 298. Byrley argues that Peter here “pictures the current conflict and persecution of the readers as a necessary and inevitable product and reflection of the cosmic struggle against Satan and the demonic realm.” Peter urges his readers “to view their present conflict with hostile human individuals and institutions as an important part of the ongoing and eschatological conflict with Satan (5:8–10)” (p. 78).

⁸⁰ John H. Elliott points out that 1 Peter 2:9 serves as the “basis for the following exhortation concerning the behavior of God’s family in society.” *1 Peter*, AB (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2000), 449; also 474–76. Paul J. Achtemeier agrees: “Taken together, vv. 9–10* are both climax and transition. As climax of the passage that has addressed itself to the nature of the community and its faith, it points out that those who suffer in their society as exiles and aliens are in fact the true people of God. As transition it prepares the chosen community for the hostile confrontation with its antagonistic environment.” *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 168. The ensuing exhortations address (1) living distinctively from the Gentiles (a holy nation) and (2) showing the unbelievers through words and actions how they may know God (royal priesthood). Indeed, 2:11–12 presents these principles: “Abstain from the passions of the flesh. . . . Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that . . . they may see your good deeds and glorify God.”

19:5–6.⁸¹ Israel’s identification as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation is a critical description of the role of Israel among the hostile nations. In spite of the hostility that would be exercised toward Israel by the seed of the serpent (the surrounding nations), God’s expectation for Israel is to minister to the nations and be distinct from the nations in their behavior. Peter identifies the purpose of the church in this hostile, evil world as parallel to God’s purpose for Israel among the hostile, evil Gentiles.⁸² Since he chose them, and they are a people for his own possession, they have a responsibility to function as a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

Holy Nation

Peter issues several exhortations toward holiness and distinctive living, particularly in believers’ interaction with unbelievers, the seed of the serpent. Believers have been delivered from darkness and must live in a way that reflects the “marvelous light” into which they have been brought (2:9–10). Peter urges his readers, “Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance” (1:14) because this lifestyle is futile (1:18). The “passions of the flesh” (τῶν σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν) wage war against the soul (2:11), so believers should live “no longer for human passions [ἀνθρώπων ἐπιθυμίας] but for the will of God” (4:2). The believer’s refusal to conform to the world requires abstaining from fleshly lusts. Before conversion, believers had already spent enough time behaving as the seed of the serpent, doing what “the Gentiles” do (4:3).⁸³ Peter refers to “the Gentiles” (τὰ ἔθνη) in the same way in which John sometimes refers to the “world” (κόσμος). “The Gentiles” refers to “non-believing ‘outsiders.’” Peter’s instructions to maintain honorable conduct among the Gentiles (1 Pet. 2:12) and to avoid doing “what the Gentiles want to do” (4:3) seem to be parallel with Jesus’ statements about being “in the world” but not “of the world” in John 17:11–18. The surrounding Gentiles were likely putting pressure on these believers by marginalizing them and encouraging them to return to their pre-Christian lifestyle (4:3). Instead of conforming to sinful passions, believers must be holy, living distinctively (1 Pet. 1:14–16), keeping their “conduct among the Gentiles honorable” (2:12).

Royal Priesthood

Behaving distinctively enables believers to carry out their role as a royal priesthood, even when the unbelieving world is exercising intense enmity against believers. As Israel was supposed to function as a kingdom of priests in the OT, so in the NT the church is “to mediate God’s blessings to the nations, as it proclaims the gospel.”⁸⁴ When the church lives distinctively “among the Gentiles”—not when the church lives like the Gentiles—the church is able to proclaim God’s excellencies to the Gentiles. Peter’s hope is that the distinctive conduct of God’s

⁸¹ Davids argues that 1 Peter 2:9 also alludes to Isaiah 43:20–21, which speaks of God’s chosen people declaring his praise. *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 134–35.

⁸² Though the similarities between Exodus 19 and 1 Peter 2 are prominent, it is important to note the dissimilarities between the two. Most notably, the distinct covenantal basis of each is different. The language of Exodus 19, under the Old Covenant, says, “If you will, . . . then you shall be” (19:5–6). Peter’s wording, under the New Covenant, says, “But you are, . . . that you should” (2:9). Thus, under the Old Covenant, the responsibility to obey precedes the privileged identity. Under the New Covenant, the privileged identity precedes and enables the responsibility. D. Edmond Hiebert notes that “the assignment given to the nation of Israel—to be God’s witness concerning Him to the nations—was frustrated by their unfaithfulness and sin.” The church now “has the same assignment to be God’s witness to the world.” *1 Peter* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1992), 147. Additionally, the fact that God desires the church and Israel to carry out similar functions among the Gentiles does not imply that the church has permanently replaced Israel.

⁸³ Elliott, 466.

⁸⁴ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 115.

people will lead the Gentiles to “glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12).⁸⁵ Wives may be able to “win” their husbands (to faith) through their distinctive behavior (3:1–2). Even if they do not come to “glorify God,” the good behavior of believers will “put to silence the ignorance of foolish people” (2:15). The distinctive behavior of believers will cause those who revile them to be put to shame (3:16). Ultimately, God will bless believers who suffer unjustly (3:14; 5:14–16), but those who malign believers unjustly will have to give account before God (4:4–5).

Summary

For Peter, the devil is the chief adversary of the church (1 Pet. 5:7), and he is the driving force behind human opposition to the church. In the face of this opposition from the world and its ruler, the church must maintain its responsibility to function faithfully as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (2:9–10). The instruction immediately following this purpose statement for the church is to abstain from fleshly lusts (2:11) and to behave honorably among the Gentiles (2:12). Specifically, believers are not to behave as the Gentiles (non-Christians) do (4:3).

John

Scholars have recognized the key role of polarities, or dualisms, in John’s theology, and John establishes a strong polarity between the church and the world.⁸⁶ The Johannine worldview consists of a “cosmic conflict between the world of light and the world of darkness” demonstrated primarily in the “struggle between God and his Messiah on the one hand and Satan on the other.”⁸⁷ Ladd perhaps provides the most succinct summary of John’s concept of the world: “Man at enmity with God.”⁸⁸ In John’s writings, this conflict begins with Jesus’ conflict with the world and extends into a further conflict between the followers of Jesus and the world—enmity between believers and unbelievers.⁸⁹ This conflict directly follows the pattern of the enmity between the seeds in Genesis 3:15.

⁸⁵ Thielman points out that the exhortation to holiness does not imply that Christians should withdraw from societies that are hostile to believers. Rather, they are “to live out their lives under the close scrutiny (*epopteuo*) of unbelievers (2:12; 3:2). . . . Peter hopes that as Christians live good lives under the scrutiny of their detractors, their persecutors will be attracted to the God whom the Christians worship and become Christians themselves.” *Theology of the New Testament*, 578.

⁸⁶ Andreas J. Köstenberger defines this type of dualism as “a way of looking at the world in terms of polar opposites.” *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, BTNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 277. Rudolf Bultmann writes extensively of Johannine dualism, which, he argues, derives from Gnostic ideas. *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), 2:15–32. Scholars have since rejected Bultmann’s arguments while still seeing John’s use of polarities as critical to his theology. For critique of Bultmann, see G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 265–72; and Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 109–19. For helpful studies of Johannine dualism/polarities see also Ladd, 223–36; Judith Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 80–87; Köstenberger, 282–92; Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 119–29.

⁸⁷ Köstenberger, 281.

⁸⁸ Ladd, 226. Lieu states, “Whether we are to think of active hostility or passive unconcern, of official action or popular reaction, of Jew or of Greek, or both, for the author it is undifferentiated ‘world’” (p. 84).

⁸⁹ Bauckham defines this enmity as an “ethical dualism,” in which “two categories of humans, the righteous and the wicked, are contrasted” and a “soteriological dualism” in which “humanity is divided into two categories by people’s acceptance or rejection of a savior” (p. 120). He argues that these concepts develop as the enmity toward Jesus develops John’s Gospel. In the later chapters of John’s Gospel, “Jesus’s disciples, who are ‘not from the world’ and are ‘chosen from the world,’ become, along with Jesus, one of the two components of a dualistic contrast between them and the world.” *Gospel of Glory*, 128.

John's key word in describing the world in opposition to the church is κόσμος. John uses κόσμος a total of 105 times, compared to 81 uses in the rest of the NT.⁹⁰ In contrast, John uses αἰών only 14 times in his Gospel and Letters and 26 times in Revelation.⁹¹ John never uses αἰών in the Pauline sense. In general, scholars agree on three primary senses for κόσμος: (1) the created material world (Jn. 17:5, 25), (2) humanity in general (Jn. 1:29; 3:16–17), (3) sinful humanity in opposition to God and his people (Jn. 14:27; 17:9).

John presents a vivid picture of Satan working through the world against Jesus' followers. John identifies Satan as the ruler of this κόσμος three times (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)—the ruler of “man at enmity with God.” Even after Jesus' great victory over Satan in his death and resurrection, John affirms that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 Jn. 5:19).⁹² Those who oppose believers follow the pattern of Cain who was “of the evil one” (3:12). As the energizing force behind human enmity against God and believers, Satan also influences men to oppose God's people.

In spite of the intense danger believers experience as residents in a hostile world, God does not remove believers from the world (Jn. 17:11); instead, he sends believers into the world as he had sent his Son into the world (17:18). Jesus does pray that the Father will “keep them from the evil one” (17:15) as they demonstrate that they are not “of the world” (17:14, 16). One intention for their mission to the world is that the world may believe that Jesus is from God (17:21–22).

John's key text dealing with the believer's responsibility in relation to the world is 1 John 2:15–17. Here, as in the OT (Dt. 6:5; Josh. 23:11), a key instruction for God's people addresses the object of their love. John commands the people, “Do not love the world.” If a person loves the world, he is demonstrating that he does not love the Father: “the love of the Father is not in him.”⁹³ It is unlikely that John is here referring to the created material world,⁹⁴ or to the people of

⁹⁰ The term κόσμος occurs 102 times combined in John's Gospel and Letters, demonstrating the importance of κόσμος in John's theology. The only nouns used more frequently in John's writings are Ἰησοῦς (258x), πατήρ (154x), and θεός (150x).

⁹¹ Jn. 4:14; 6:51, 58; 8:35 (2x), 51, 52; 9:32; 10:28; 11:26; 12:34; 13:8; 14:16; 1 Jn. 2:17; 2 Jn. 1:2; Rev. 1:6, 18; 4:9, 10; 5:13; 7:12; 10:6; 11:15; 14:11; 15:7; 19:3; 20:10; 22:5. In each of the references in Revelation, αἰών occurs twice (εἰς [τοῦς] αἰῶνας [τῶν] αἰώνων). All of John's uses of αἰών except one functions as the object of the preposition εἰς, “unto the age(s).” The exception is John 9:32, which is the object of ἐκ, referring to the beginning of the age.

⁹² John R. W. Stott says that the world is in Satan's “grip and under his control. . . . It is not pictured as struggling vigorously to be free but as quietly lying, perhaps even unconsciously asleep, in the embrace of Satan. The evil one does not ‘touch’ the Christian, but the world is helplessly in his grasp.” *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 193.

⁹³ Interpreters debate whether the genitive here is subjective, objective, or plenary. Few support the idea of a subjective genitive (“the Father does not love him”). For this view, see J. L. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 73. Many interpreters argue for an objective genitive, which seems to be the primary thrust: “if you love the world, you do not love the Father.” For example, see Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 95; and Jobes, 111. Robert Yarbrough argues, however, that there is a sense in which the objective genitive “presupposes a subjective genitive,” since a person cannot love the Father without the Father first loving the person (1 Jn. 4:19). *1–3 John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 130. Gary Derickson agrees and identifies the genitive as “plenary.” *1, 2, & 3 John*, EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012), 200. For this view, see also Bruce G. Schuchard, *1–3 John*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2012), 209. Though the idea that the objective genitive “presupposes a subjective genitive” in this case may be true, it is uncertain if this is John's intention. John's main point seems to be addressing the object of the believer's love: the Father or the world.

⁹⁴ Contra Rudolf Schnackenburg, who argues that the use of κόσμος in 2:15 refers to “the material world and all that is in it,” but the use of κόσμος in 2:16 refers to the “realm opposed to God.” For Schnackenburg, the

the world.⁹⁵ John is almost certainly referring to the evil system of this world or the pattern of thoughts and behaviors that characterize the portion of humanity that opposes God.⁹⁶ In that case, this is an exceptional use of κόσμος for John, but it is consistent with James's use of κόσμος.⁹⁷ John is not saying that loving the universe or the people in the universe is a problem. He is saying that loving the world is equivalent to aligning oneself with the evil system of this world that is under the authority of Satan. John's reference to "the things in the world" in terms of a person's lust and pride seems to be to a way of life or behavioral patterns that follow the ruler of this world and the human patterns that follow Satan's ways. This is the mindset and behavior of the seed of the serpent. These behaviors are diametrically opposed to the Father (2:16), and are from the world, which is "passing away along with its desires" (2:17).⁹⁸ Thus, John "sees the Christian life as one which demands a clear choice between God and the 'world'; that is, in practical terms, the Christian must not compromise with the principles and ways of pagan society."⁹⁹

John summarizes this "worldly" type of behavior with three descriptive phrases: "the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life." John's first category is "the desires of the flesh" (ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκός). The term ἐπιθυμία can refer to positive desires, but it most often refers to sinful passions.¹⁰⁰ John uses σάρξ as a subjective genitive to convey that "the flesh" is performing the action of ἐπιθυμία. Scholars understand σάρξ here in three possible

material world is what believers must refrain from loving. *The Johannine Epistles: Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Reginald and Ilse Fuller (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 125–26.

⁹⁵ Contra Gundry, who argues that "world" here must refer to the unbelieving people of the world since John uses that sense in 1 John 2:2. Thus, Gundry says that 1 John 2:15 teaches that believers should "not love non-Christians" (pp. 60–61). Elsewhere, however, John uses two different senses of κόσμος in the same sentence (Jn. 1:10). He is certainly not required to maintain the same sense in 2:15 simply because he used that sense in 2:2. For basic agreement with Gundry's concept, see Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 81; George Johnston, "ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΗ and ΚΟΣΜΟΣ in the New Testament," *NTS* 10 (1964): 356; Robert G. Bratcher, "The Meaning of *Kosmos*, 'World,' in the New Testament," *The Bible Translator* 31, no. 4 (Oct 1980): 433.

⁹⁶ Daniel L. Akin classifies κόσμος as "an evil organized earthly system controlled by the power of the evil one" (p. 108). Jobes identifies κόσμος as "all that is in rebellion against God" (p. 111); see also Stott, 104; and Sasse, "κόσμος," 3:895.

⁹⁷ Lars Kierspel argues that 1 John 2:15–17 introduces "one exceptional sense of κόσμος," defining it as "the realm in which evil desires are at home." *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 160. In support of this idea, I. Howard Marshall says, "It follows that here John is thinking of the attractions of a life lived in opposition to the commandments of God, one in which God's laws for the use of the world and the things in it are disobeyed." *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 143. C. Haas, Marinus de Jonge, and J. L. Swellengrebel refer to κόσμος here as "a way of life that is in the power of the evil one." *A Handbook on the Letters of John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: UBS, 1994), 55. Kruse identifies κόσμος here as "attitudes or values that are opposed to God" (p. 94).

⁹⁸ Paul R. Raabe notes that the idea of being "of the world" (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου) "indicates both origin from the world and agreement with the world. To be of the world is to be without God. . . . For John, only two conditions exist: either of God or of the world." "A Dynamic Tension: God and World in John," *Concordia Journal* 21 (April 1995): 137.

⁹⁹ C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), 41. See also Yarbrough, who says that John here "counsels strategic disavowal of loyalties to features of the world that would surely compromise the total devotion that is appropriate to God alone" (p. 128).

¹⁰⁰ Kruse notes, "The word 'desire' (*epithymia*) is found 38 times in the NT. In only three places does it have positive connotations (Luke 22:15; Phil 1:23; 1 Th. 2:17); in all the rest it has morally negative connotations, as it does in the present context, where the NIV translates it as 'cravings'" (p. 95).

ways: (1) in the Pauline sense referring to flesh as the fallen sinful nature;¹⁰¹ (2) emphasizing one's humanness or non-eternality (e.g., Isa. 40:6, 8);¹⁰² or (3) referring to the "flesh" as one's body.¹⁰³ John uses σάρξ 22 other times, none of which refer to the first sense, fallen sinful nature.¹⁰⁴ It seems best, then, to understand σάρξ in line with John's pattern of usage.¹⁰⁵ In this case, either of the latter two options could work, and there is some overlap between the two views. The third option, though, seems to provide a more fitting and distinct parallel to "desires of the eyes."¹⁰⁶ Under the first two views, the parallelism is lost if "flesh" is something inherently sinful but "eyes" and "life" are not inherently sinful. Table 2 displays the consistent connection of sinful behavior with neutral aspects of humanity in 1 John 2:16:

Table 2. Sinful Distortions of Neutral Aspects of Humanity

Sinful Behavior	Neutral Aspect of Humanity
Desires/lusts (ἐπιθυμία)	Flesh/body (σάρξ)
Desires/lusts (ἐπιθυμία)	Eyes
Pride	Life

¹⁰¹ The majority of commentators explain σάρξ in 2:16 this way. See Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 33–34; Stott, 103–04; Hiebert, 101–02; Akin, 109–10; Kruse, 95; Schuchard, 211; Derickson, 202–04.

¹⁰² Yarbrough argues for this view and against the third view, but his translation, "what the body hankers for," fits best with the third view. He argues that the phrase refers to "things originating in innate human nature as unredeemed by God. This interpretation relates 'body' more to the OT and Jewish frame of reference in which 'flesh' is the human as distinct from the divine' . . . rather than to Greek background where physical desire was often regarded as a priori as inimical to piety" (p. 132). For this view, see also Edward Malatesta, *Interiority and Covenant: A Study of εἶναι ἐν and μένειν ἐν in the First Letter of Saint John*, Analecta Biblica (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 184; Marshall, 144–45; Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 308–10; Smalley, 83–84; Jobes, 112.

¹⁰³ Brown identifies this as the "classical Greek" sense (p. 308). Georg Strecker refers to σάρξ here as "the human body with its desires." *The Johannine Letters*, Hermeneia, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 59. For this view, see Leedy, 55; and Andrew David Naselli, "Do Not Love the World: Breaking the Evil Enchantment of Worldliness (A Sermon on 1 John 2:15–17)," *SBJT* 22, no. 1 (2018): 117, 125n12.

¹⁰⁴ John often uses σάρξ to refer to Jesus' incarnation in which he became σάρξ (Jn. 1:14; 1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn. 7; see also 6 references to eating Jesus' "flesh" in Jn. 6:51–56). Other examples refer to what is merely human as opposed to spiritual (Jn. 1:13; 3:6; 6:63; 8:15; cf. 17:2). Revelation includes seven uses of σάρξ in three verses referring to the material substance of dead bodies (17:16; 19:18, 21). John never uses σάρξ in the specified Pauline sense outside of 1 John 2:16, so it is unlikely that he is using this sense in 2:16. Against this argument, Hiebert suggests that John could have said "lusts of the body" instead of "lusts of the flesh" (p. 102). Presumably, John could have said ἡ ἐπιθυμία τοῦ σώματος. John, however, always uses σῶμα to refer to a corpse, a dead body (Jn. 2:21; 19:31, 38, 40; 18:13; 20:12).

¹⁰⁵ This does not imply that John is unaware of Paul's concept of "flesh." Rather, it is quite possible that John's thought is informed by Paul's teaching on the flesh (e.g., Gal. 5:16, Eph. 2:3) and that he understands that the only reason any of the body's cravings are sinful is that they are driven by the fallen sinful nature (the Pauline sense of flesh).

¹⁰⁶ This is not necessarily to say that John's three descriptions are entirely separate and distinct. It is possible that to some extent "the three phrases are simply broad and overlapping ways to describe 'all that is in the world.'" Naselli, 117. The three descriptions, however, are separate and parallel to an extent, and none of the three entirely encompass the others. In the first two views listed, "desire of the flesh" would have to function as a more general category under which "desire of the eyes" would be a subcategory. Both Akin (p. 109–10) and Kruse (p. 95), argue that the first category (desires of the flesh) is the general category under which the second two (desires of the eyes and pride of life) are subcategories. The third view listed allows the three categories to remain distinct from each other and parallel: the things the body desires, the things the eyes desire, and taking pride in one's assets.

John seems to be identifying three areas that are not inherently sinful (flesh, eyes, and life) and showing how the world is characterized by the temptation to use these desires for the evil purposes of the ruler of this world. The collective outworking of these characteristics in a sinful way comprises “the world.” Thus, the main idea behind “desire of the flesh” seems to be “what the body hankers for,”¹⁰⁷ or “what your body sinfully craves.”¹⁰⁸

The interpretation of the second characteristic, the desire of the eyes (ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν), is more straightforward. The term ὀφθαλμῶν is a subjective genitive here, and the eyes are performing the action of “desiring.” Interpreters generally agree that the basic problem with desire of the eyes is coveting what one sees.¹⁰⁹ Dodd is probably correct in identifying the desire of the eyes as “the tendency to be captivated by the outward show of things without enquiring into their real values.”¹¹⁰ The desire of the eyes refers to a person’s desire for things because of the attractive appearance of the object.

The third characteristic, “pride of life” (ἡ ἀλαζονεῖα τοῦ βίου), refers to boasting or haughtiness based on what a person has, whether material possessions or high status. English versions vary in their translations: “[boastful] pride of life” (KJV, NKJV, NIV, NASB, RSV, ESV), “arrogance produced by material possessions” (NET), “pride in riches” (NRSV), “pride in one’s lifestyle” (HCSB), “pride in our achievements and possessions” (NLT). Some scholars limit “pride of life” to pride in material possessions,¹¹¹ but “life” (βίος) can refer to more than just material possessions; it can refer to a person’s status as well as non-material assets (Lk. 8:14; 1 Tim. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:4).¹¹²

These characteristics of “all that is in the world” must not become the object of the believer’s love because they are “not of the Father” but are “from the world” (1 Jn. 2:16).¹¹³ This lifestyle is “of the world” because it follows the pattern that the ruler of this world has established for it (1 Jn. 5:19)—the pattern the serpent himself demonstrated in the temptations of Eve and of Jesus (Gen. 3:6; Lk. 4:1–13). Though John does not make this parallel explicit, it is quite possible that John has Genesis 3 in mind when he describes the danger of loving the world.¹¹⁴ And it is certainly possible that the divine author responsible for Genesis and 1 John intended this parallel. When describing the behaviors that characterize this world, John may indeed have in mind the time at which Satan began to influence humanity for evil. For John, these are the characteristics of those who are of the world and who oppose Jesus and believers; thus, they are “of their father the devil” (Jn. 8:44) or “of the evil one” (1 Jn. 3:12). Additionally,

¹⁰⁷ Yarbrough, 132.

¹⁰⁸ Naselli, 117.

¹⁰⁹ Raymond Brown notes that “in the OT to follow one’s eyes toward where one is inclined is more often equivalent to resisting God’s will” (cf. Gen. 3:6; 6:2; 3:2; Num. 15:39; also Mk. 9:47)” (p. 310).

¹¹⁰ Dodd, 41. See also Brown, 311; and Jobes, 113.

¹¹¹ Marshall, 145; Kruse, 95–96; Strecker, 59; and Jobes, 113.

¹¹² For example, Akin refers to this as “boasting of what he [man] has and does” (p. 110–11). Smalley argues that pride of life includes “attitudes and activities (‘styles’ of life) as well as material possessions and attractions” (p. 85). See also, Stott, 104; Haas, de Jonge, and Swellengrebel, 57; Derickson, 204–05.

¹¹³ Bultmann correctly argues that to be “of the world” is “synonymous with ‘to be from below’ (8:23) and ‘to be of the devil’ (8:44; 1 Jn. 3:8).” *Theology of the NT*, 19.

¹¹⁴ It is probably best to see Genesis 3 as the basis for John’s three-fold description and probably for the temptation narratives as well. Luke 4 is not the basis for John’s writing, but it supports the idea that temptation from the serpent follows similar patterns throughout time. Some argue against any intentional parallels between these passages. For example, see Marshall, 146; Stott, 104; Kruse, 96. Brown is particularly critical of a connection of 2:16 with the temptation of Jesus (p. 307).

the reference to Cain in 3:12, in particular, demonstrates that John has in mind the serpent's work in the early chapters of Genesis. Table 3 shows three parallel elements of temptation from the serpent in these accounts:¹¹⁵

Table 3. Parallelism in Genesis 3:6, Luke 4:1–13; and 1 John 2:16

Genesis 3:6	Luke 4:1–13	1 John 2:16
The tree was good for food.	Command this stone to become bread.	The things the body desires
It was a delight to the eyes.	The devil . . . showed him all the kingdoms of the world.	The things the eyes desire
The tree was to be desired to make one wise.	If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.	The pride in status and possessions

Assuming the legitimacy of the parallels, these are the areas in which Satan works to influence humanity away from God and toward himself. These are the characteristics of those who are under the power of the evil one (1 Jn. 5:19).

Thus, for John, the “world” refers to the influence of Satan over the unbelieving people of the world. The world, therefore, opposes Jesus in his ministry, and the world opposes believers in the church. The distinctive behavioral and thought patterns of unbelievers characterize “the world” which believers must refuse to love. It is helpful to understand that all humans are born as members of the “world.” Carson helpfully notes, “All believers have been chosen out of the world (15:19); they are not something other than ‘world’ when the gospel first comes to them. They would not have become true disciples apart from the love of God for the world.”¹¹⁶

Synthesis

Based on this analysis, the NT authors present consistent concepts of the world, though they use different terminology and emphases. The following themes are consistent in each passage.

1. Satan's role as the chief opponent of the church and believers is prominent in each of the key NT passages on the world. Some refer to Satan in the immediate context (Eph. 2:2; Jas. 4:7) and others reference Satan's influence in the world in the same letter but not in the immediate context (1 Pet. 5:8; 1 Jn. 5:19). In the latter instances, in the overall context of the letters, Satan is still seen as the energizing force behind opposition to the church—behind the behavior and mindset of the world.
2. Each of the texts uses one or more of the key NT terms related to the world: “world” (κόσμος in Eph. 2:2–3; Jas. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15–16), “age” (αἰών in Eph. 2:2–3), and “the nations/Gentiles” (τὰ ἔθνη in Eph. 4:17, 1 Pet. 2:11; cf. 4:3).
3. Each of the key texts specifies that the role of the church and believers is to live in the world and among unbelievers but to be distinct and separate from the world in behavior, thinking, and affections.

¹¹⁵ This table is generally based on the table in Naselli, 116–17. Blomberg also identifies these as “fascinating parallels.” *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: B&H, 1997), 223.

¹¹⁶ Carson, *John*, 205.

4. James and John both emphasize that it is not merely a problem to act or think in a worldly way; rather, worldliness consists of the *desire* to be a friend of the world (Jas. 4:4) and the *love* of all that is in the world (1 Jn. 2:15–16). Worldliness is when believers are enamored with the sinful behavior of unbelievers.
5. The critical element that Paul, James, Peter, and John each include in their key passages dealing with the world is “the passions” or “lusts” (ἐπιθυμία in Eph. 2:2–3; Tit. 2:12; 1 Pet. 2:9–12, 1 Jn. 2:16; ἡδονή in Jas. 4:1–4), particularly “lusts/passions of the flesh” (ἐπιθυμία and σάρξ in Eph. 2:2–3; 1 Pet. 2:11–12; 1 Jn. 2:16). Table 4 displays the similar themes in these key passages:

Table 4. Key Terms in NT Descriptions of the World

Passage	Key Phrase for “World”	Associated Behavior
Eph. 2:2–3	κόσμος and αἰών – “Following the course of this world” (2:2)	ἐπιθυμία and σάρξ – “the passions of our flesh” (2:3)
Eph. 4:17, 22	τὰ ἔθνη – “You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do” (4:17).	ἐπιθυμία – “deceitful desires” (4:22)
Jas. 4:1, 4	κόσμος – “Friendship with the world is enmity with God” (4:4).	ἡδονή – “Your passions are at war within you.” (4:1)
1 Pet. 2:9–12	τὰ ἔθνη – “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable” (2:11).	ἐπιθυμία and σάρξ – “the passions of the flesh” (2:11)
1 Jn. 2:15–16	κόσμος – “Do not love the world” (2:15).	ἐπιθυμία and σάρξ – “the desires of the flesh” (2:16)

What is noteworthy in each of the key passages is that they do not specifically refer to “culture” or “pressure from culture” (except possibly 1 Peter 4:1–3). Frame provides a helpful definition of culture: “Culture is what a society has made of God’s creation, together with its ideals of what it ought to make of it.”¹¹⁷ John’s description of worldliness in 1 John 2:15–17 (and the other key NT passages) does not necessarily focus on sins of the culture, though the sinful culture is certainly relevant in discussions of the world. The serpent does not tempt Eve and Jesus using pressure from culture. He tempts them to give their allegiance to himself rather than God and to trust his words rather than God’s. Eve aligns herself with the serpent, and she chooses the fruit. In her alignment with the serpent, she is drawn in by her human impulses to commit the sin of tasting the fruit. Since the Fall, worldliness is rooted within the human heart, and the serpent so moves in the world to ignite the flame of lust and pride in the human heart. Men become worldly when they succumb to the seduction of the serpent to give allegiance to him instead of to the Father.

The point here is that the actions of sinful culture do not necessarily or comprehensively define worldliness.¹¹⁸ To identify worldliness, the biblical writers do not go out and examine the culture and pick and choose which parts are “bad” and, thus, “worldly.” When determining what actions are “worldly,” examining what is prominent in sinful culture does not present a comprehensive picture. The world and sinful culture are certainly integrally connected. The biblical authors describe worldliness in terms of “lusts” and “pride.” The accumulation of

¹¹⁷ Frame, 857. For other helpful discussions of culture, see D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); and William Edgar, *Created & Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017).

¹¹⁸ Contrary to Frame, 866. Naselli follows Frame and summarizes 1 John 2:15 this way: “Do not take pleasure in the anti-God culture that permeates this fallen world. . . . Do not take pleasure in the bad part of culture” (p. 114). The discussions by Frame (pp. 853–908) and Naselli (pp. 111–26), overall, are excellent and enormously helpful. The only element with which this paper takes issue is an over-simplified definition of “world.”

humanity acting upon these lusts and passions and exercising the pride of life certainly manifests itself in “the bad part of culture.” But “the bad part of culture” is an insufficient description of the world and worldliness. Being “of the world” is fundamentally a product of the human condition rather than a product of sinful culture.

A person may be acting according to his lusts apart from any influence from the culture and committing deeds that are *not* approved by or acceptable to the culture at large (sex abuse, incest, greed); but he is still demonstrating that he loves the world instead of the Father. He is loving the mindset and the behavioral patterns promoted by the serpent. He is behaving like the unbelievers behave. He is acting like a non-Christian. He is acting like a “worldling.” “Worldliness” is behaving and thinking like the serpent and his seed.

Conclusion

Worldliness then, according to the apostles, consists of (1) living like and thinking like unbelievers as well as (2) desiring to be friends with and loving the behaviors and thinking that is characteristic of unbelievers. The primary manifestation of worldliness is acting or thinking on the basis of passions and lusts and not on the basis of love for the Father. “Lusts” or “passions” do not comprehensively define “worldliness” but they are the recurring elements in each key NT passage on the world. Paul adds a variety of other sins in his discussions (Eph. 2:2–3; 4:17–22), and John adds the element of “the pride of life” to his description of worldliness because it reflects the mindset the ruler of this world wants to instill in humans (Gen. 3:5–6). The basic problem of worldliness is that it follows after the patterns of Satan and those who operate under his influence. A failure to be distinct from the world constitutes an alignment with the seed of the serpent. A believer who adopts a lifestyle that is indistinct from that of an unbeliever aids and abets the serpent’s enmity against God and actually makes himself the enemy of God. When a believer adopts the mindset of the world and lives according to passions of the flesh, he places himself on the enemy’s side in a losing battle—and this enemy’s final destruction is certain.