Issue # 16 ◆ April / May 2016

"Watchman, what of the night ?"

" The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you, the hour and the end!" Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)

▶ THIS ISSUE'S READING

THE ENCROACHMENT OF WORLDLINESS AND ITS DEADLY IMPACT ON OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

Editor's Preface

This bi-monthly issue of the thought paper was inspired by a lecture this editor attended some time ago. The speaker was a Messianic believer in Yeshua (Jesus) and member of an area Messianic congregation. The featured topic was presented reasonably well. At the conclusion of the talk, however, the moderator began urging the attendees to support the modern Jewish State along with the idea that all our hopes in Yeshua rest with the Messianic believers' eventual inheritance of the present land in Israel! Just to make sure that I had not misunderstood him on this point, I was able afterward to approach the lecturer for a one on one conversation. Sure enough, despite text after text that I brought to his attention from the Bible showing that the Christian's hope and inheritance lies in the New Jerusalem in the New Heavens and the New Earth, he remained steadfast in his conviction, attempting to explain these passages within the framework of a universal Jewish earthly kingdom in this present age during the millennium.

What struck me at the time was not so much his flawed exposition of the texts (due to an unsound interpretive approach), rather it was the near total fixation of his faith on events and activities of this world - past, present, and future. For him, Christianity was not an otherworldly

faith centered in an otherworldly hope, instead it was primarily a this-worldly faith and hope. Spiritual and heavenly realities were being reinterpreted and redefined within a context of the material and earthly. Simply stated, the supernatural was being replaced with the natural.

This rationalization of our faith is much more prevalent than we realize. It is actually, perhaps, the broadest expression of "worldliness." Yet how few of us even discern this, much less give it the thoughtful scrutiny we should. By failing to grasp the far-reaching extent that worldly-mindedness permeates into every area of our lives, many of us have a very careless, limited conception of worldliness. It is with this consideration in mind, that we set forth this study and review of the issue. Our proclamation of the present truth for this time will be ineffective and powerless unless we heed the words of Jesus:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth ... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6: 19-21).

The Otherworldly Hope Of Our Faith

"I press towards the goal to win the prize which is God's call to the life above, in Christ Jesus. Let us then keep to this way of thinking, those of us who are mature. If there is any point on which you think differently, this also God will make plain to you. Only let our conduct be consistent with the level we have already reached. Agree together, my friends, to follow my example. You have us for a model; watch those whose way of life conforms to it. For, as I have often told you, and now tell you with tears in my eyes, there are many whose way of life makes them enemies of the cross of Christ. They are heading for destruction, appetite is their god, and they glory in their shame. Their minds are set on earthly things. We, by contrast, are citizens of heaven, and from heaven we expect our deliverer to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transfigure the body belonging to our humble state, and give it a form like that of his own resplendent body, by the very power which enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my friends, beloved friends whom I long for, my joy, my crown, stand thus firm in the Lord, my beloved!" (Philippians 3: 14 - 4: 1, NEB [1]).

This counsel, written by the Apostle Paul "to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Ibid. 1:1b) clearly and forcibly outlines the ultimate hope and goal of every true believer. In fact, if there was no other definite instruction in the Word of God on this matter, these verses would suffice. Our "goal [is] ... *to the life above.*" To "win (this) prize ... in Christ Jesus" which "is God's call" is the hope that is set before us by "example." Those "whose way of life makes them enemies of the cross of Christ .. are heading for destruction, appetite is their god, and they glory in their shame [because] *their minds are set on earthly things.*" Genuine Christians, "*by contrast, are citizens of heaven, and from heaven (they) expect (their) deliverer to*

***come, the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (all emphasis added).**

The "contrast" between the two classes brought into focus with these verses can be summarized as the difference between a this-worldly view of life and an other-worldly view of it. How we conduct our lives is the determining factor as to whether we are "earthly" minded or "heavenly" minded, no matter what our profession may be contrariwise. Notice what Paul says, "with tears in his eyes": that some of the professed believers at Philippi, because "their minds (were) set on earthly things," had a "way of life (which made) them enemies of the cross of Christ." The utter seriousness of this contrast and its consequence ("heading for destruction"), is enough for us to pause and consider carefully the distinction between these two view points.

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalms 14: 1b; 53: 1b). Most professed believers in God have no problem with the idea that atheists, infidels, and secularists are worldly minded. The complete denial of a supreme being, an ordered universe and a planned purpose for our existence makes them prime embodiments of "worldliness." True as it may be, this basic generalization greatly fails to convey the broader biblical understanding of what constitutes worldliness. In fact, the less Christians understand this, the narrower will their conceptions of worldly-mindedness be. For instance, most Seventh-day Adventists associate activities like smoking, drinking, swearing, carousing, etc., with worldliness and as such these are the type of things which primarily define it. This is generally true for the other faith communities as well, though the specific things identified as worldly may differ. The failure to grasp the larger perspective as God views it in His Word makes this topic a present truth issue for our time.

The fact that professed Christians - including many Seventh-day Adventists - are becoming more this-worldly minded can be witnessed everywhere. Beginning with the "Enlightenment" of the mid-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century, the paradigm shift of depending on human reason over divine revelation as the predominate factor in knowing and explaining the universe has had a cumulative effect of directing humanity's attention away from God and the heavenly realm and onto men and this earthly realm. In other words, for the first time in our history, the world-view of *ultimate* reality is being determined by human reasoning instead of divine revelation. This has been escalating progressively for more than 2½ centuries now! This paradigm is what gave rise to theological rationalism and liberalism, which tended to deny the supernatural aspect of the biblical revelation through spiritualization and allegorization of the biblical text. In effect, the Bible has been reinterpreted to conform to our this-worldly view of things. Few of us realize the tremendous impact that this has had and increasingly continues to have on our faith.

Students of Bible prophecy recognize that 1798 A.D. marked the termination of

the era of Papal supremacy (see Daniel 7: 23-25). The ending of this persecuting tyranny greatly increased the global promulgation of the Word of God and the gospel message. The Protestant Reformation of the early sixteenth century onward was central in preparing the way for this fulfillment, but it is also true that without the Reformation there would probably not have been the Enlightenment either. We should take note, that just before the Papal "dominion" was "taken away," the Enlightenment had arisen, a movement which was almost exclusively this-worldly in its focus to the exclusion of practically anything otherworldly. The French Revolution, which took place around this same time (the late eighteenth century), unreservedly incorporated this ideological principle into its struggle against the despotism of its church / state government. The results, in a relatively short time, were as oppressive and disastrous as what the former regime had been. The social, political, economic, and religious ideas introduced through this human centered principle into the world at this time are still with us today. Secularism, utopianism, existentialism, relativism, etc., are still examples of it. The Lord's messenger, Ellen G. White, wrote the following warning concerning this back in 1903:

"...the study of science, which should impart a knowledge of God, is so mingled with the speculations and theories of men that it tends to infidelity ... At the same time anarchy is seeking to sweep away all law, not only divine, but human. The centralizing of wealth and power; the vast combinations for the enriching of the few at the expense of the many; the combinations of the poorer classes for the defense of their interests and claims; the spirit of unrest, of riot and bloodshed; *the world-wide dissemination of the same teachings that led to the French Revolution - all are tending to involve the whole world in a struggle similar to that which convulsed France."* (Ed, pgs. 227-228, emph. added). [2]

With this brief synopsis of the history and significance of our present worldview as a basis, we will now search the Bible further for its teaching regarding worldliness and what that encompasses.

"Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? ... Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." (John 18: 33, 36).

During His mockery of a trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Jesus plainly declared that "My kingdom *is not of this world.*" This truth was part of "a good confession" which Christ "witnessed" at this time (see 1 Timothy 6: 13b). Throughout His public ministry, Christ taught that the principles of "the kingdom of God / heaven" (which constituted the main theme of His discourses) were diametrically the opposite of the principles of "this present evil world" (Galatians 1: 4; for example see Matthew 5: 1-12). Moreover, Jesus had earlier said "to the Jews" :

"Ye are from beneath [earth]; I am from

above [heaven]: ye are of this world; I am not of this world." (John 8: 23, emph. added).

And within hours of His trial and subsequent death, He prayed to the Father concerning His disciples:

"I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth ... Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (Ibid. 17: 14-17, 20-21).

These passages reveal a number of pertinent points. Christ's disciples - including those who would "believe on (Him) through their word" - are, like Christ, "not of the world." Jesus' desire is that His followers should not (prematurely) be taken by the Father "out of the world" but live out their lives *in* the world under the Father's watch-care against "the evil" (Satan and this "present evil world"). The "truth" (God's "word") will "sanctify them" (set them apart while *in* the world so as not to be *of* the world). Thus, the unity the Father, Christ and all Christ's disciples have amongst themselves will testify to the world of the Father's love in sending Jesus. The Writings also corroborate these points:

"The followers of Christ are to be separate from the world in principles and interests, but they are not to isolate themselves from the world. The Saviour mingled constantly with men, not to encourage them in anything that was not in accordance with God's will, but to uplift and ennoble them. 'I sanctify myself,' He declared, 'that they also might be sanctified.' John 17: 19. So the Christian is to abide among men, that the savor of divine love may be as salt to preserve the world from corruption." (CT, pg. 323). [3]

The tension that God's people experience by being in the world but not of the world requires diligent attention on the part of true believers, especially as the time of Christ's return draws nearer. As He has warned:

"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and *cares of this life*, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth." (Luke 21: 34-35, emph. added).

The Apostle John also instructs us strongly against a this-worldly affection and the disparity that exists between the world and Christ's followers:

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the

will of God abideth for ever ... And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness". (1 John 2: 15-17; 5: 19).

Notice that the world and everything in it "is not of the Father." Therefore, "the whole world lieth in wickedness" because it is under the control and manipulation of Satan, the prince and god of this world, who usurped it from Adam and Eve (our first parents) through deception, thereafter claiming it as his own (see John 12: 31; 14: 30; 16: 11; 2 Corinthians 4: 4; compare with Luke 4: 5-7). It needs to be borne in mind that while God loves the world, so much so that he has made provision for the salvation of all humanity through the work of redemption in Christ Jesus, not all humanity will accept God's gracious gift. They, along with this entire wicked world system, are heading toward the wrath of God; as stated by the Apostle Paul:

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." (Ephesians 2: 1-3).

God counts this world and the (finally) unregenerate in it as disloyal enemies:

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (James 4: 4).

The Apostle Peter describes quite graphically what will be the final outcome of this world and the things in it:

"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men ... But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Peter 3: 7, 10-13).

In light of all this testimony from God's Word (which is by no means exhaustive), it is certain that the only inheritance the people of God have is not found in this present world. Rather, "seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved [destroyed, 'burned up']", our *only* hope is " according to his [God's] promise ... (the) new heavens and a new earth." This promised hope is otherworldly, completely centered in the salvific work of the Lord Jesus:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again

unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1: 3-5).

With this hope so plainly set before us, the *same* hope that God's people throughout the ages of salvation history looked forward to (see Hebrews, chapter 11, particularly verses 8-16), we also have before us the most effective antidote for worldliness that one *in this world* can obtain, as the Scriptures counsel:

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12: 2).

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, than shall ye also appear with him in glory." (Colossians 3: 1-4).

And as the Writings likewise testify:

"The true Christian's joys and consolation must and will be in heaven. The longing souls of those who have tasted of the powers of the world to come and have feasted on heavenly joys, will not be satisfied with things of earth ... their consolation and chief joy (will) be in the things of heaven, their sweet home. The power of attraction to God and heaven will then be so great that nothing can draw their minds from the great object of securing the soul's salvation and honoring and glorifying God." (EW, pgs. 112-113). [4] ❖ **GLP**

1. *The New English Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), 235.

2. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1952), 227-228.

3. White, *Counsels To Parents, Teachers, And Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 323.

4. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945), 112-113.

* All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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