

“Protection . . . Not Escape”—John 17:14-17

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Protection . . . Not Escape”, is John 17:14-17 → These are the words of Jesus: *I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How does one protect himself from sin and its affects upon his life? You may forbid your children to “hang around” other children whom you consider to be a “bad” influence and might corrupt your child. You may refuse to take part in certain activities with co-workers or friends which you believe to be wrong or inappropriate. You may strive to protect your family from sinful worldly influences and temptations by limiting media exposure and putting internet passwords and “locks” in place. Yet, no matter how much you strive to keep yourself or others protected from the sinful worldly influences and temptations, you still have your own sinful nature with which to contend. Jesus says, *out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness,*

slander—to mention a few of the sins into which we are tempted. (cf. Matthew 15:19). Apparently we don't have to be influenced by others to sin. We've been born with enough sin in our hearts to dream it up ourselves!

Yet, when you do strive to act differently than the sinful world and its influences you will experience “push back,” ridicule or even persecution. The reason for such reactions is because, at that moment, you actually “look” different than the world around you and, because you refuse to “join in,” you stand as judgment upon those who do. In such situations you are actually being engaged by your one enemy, the devil, striving to lead you to hell by tempting you into sin.

Our text is a portion of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, referred to as such because He is praying for His Church as it remains in the world with its sinful desires, behaviors and influences. Thus He prayed that His disciples might be protected from the world and *the evil one* (i.e. *satan*). (verse 15) He makes the statement in verse 14 of our text that *the world hates us because we are not of the world, just as He was not of the world*.

While it is rather obvious from the Gospels how Jesus was *not of the world*, it may not seem that obvious for us. Jesus' whole life was so detached from the world that He had no place to call “home” in terms of worldly possessions. (cf. Luke 9:58) This is in direct contrast to the people of His day and we as well. We are so tied to our possessions, jobs,

relationships, hobbies and so forth that Jesus' very life seems way "outside the box" of our thinking and living—not to mention His teaching which accompanied His living. In fact, such desire to model the behavior of Jesus as Lord has led many throughout the centuries to give up all worldly possessions and pleasures and retreat to a life of solitude devoted to prayer and meditation. (i.e. monastic living—monks and nuns). However, many of those who chose such a life were also striving to escape not simply the sinful worldly influences but their own sinful hearts and thoughts by disciplining their bodies in self-mortification.

Notice Jesus says that which make you *not of the world* is the same as that which made Him *not of the world*—God's Word. Jesus' life, teachings, actions and ministry were based completely upon God's written Word in the Old Testament. He stated this purpose in Matthew 5:17 → *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets* (i.e. the Old Testament Scriptures); *I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*. He submitted Himself to the very Word over which He is Lord for your forgiveness and salvation!

Thus Jesus' prayer in verse 14 of our text: ***I have given them Your word***, *and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world*. God's written Word is the "filter" through which everything is judged by the Christian. Thus, when you refuse to give in to influences and temptations to sin your reason for doing so is

much more than an opinion. Rather, it is governed by something much more stable than your personal opinion. It is governed by God's written Word which sinners do not want to hear and will resist vehemently. So He prays for us in verse 17 of our text: *Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.* To *sanctify* means to "set apart for special purpose." We continue to be set apart—different than the world—by obeying God's Word as our guide for our thoughts, words and deeds.

Jesus did not pray for our escape from the world in the midst of such persecution, rejection and struggles. A prayer for escape would actually defeat the whole purpose for which Christ came and even our existence. It is a natural tendency for people to find an immediate escape from troubles and struggles in one form or another. Whether it be activities from work to self-sabotaging substance abuse, there is a sense in which people are all expert "escape artists" because of sin. Even the Christian's desire to leave this world is not to escape suffering but rather to be with Jesus! God's Word tell you to embrace and even rejoice in your suffering for the name of Jesus. (cf. Romans 5:3-5) 1 Peter 4:13 says: *Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.*

Christianity was never meant to withdraw a person from life in the world but rather to equip that person better to deal with it in his daily vocations. As Paul pointed Pastor Timothy to *the sacred writings, which*

are able to make people wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, He reminded him that *all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work* (cf. 2 Timothy 3:15-17)—that is, equipped to look different than the world! Because we are different from the world as we proclaim *the truth* of God’s Word we need the protection which only God can give us in the victory of Jesus over the power of sin and the devil. We need both His forgiveness when we do give into sin as well as His strength to resist sin.

The purpose for us being protected *in the world* is to continue sharing the Gospel with the world even if sinners don’t want to hear it and reject us. Since *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ* (cf. Romans 10:17), that Gospel needs to be proclaimed in the hearing of those who vehemently oppose it, as it is the truth through which the Holy Spirit can work to set those same people free from their slavery to sin! Jesus says to you in John 8:31-32 → *If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* This is why Jesus prayed later in His High Priestly Prayer: *I do not ask for these only* (referring to His disciples), *but also **for those who will believe in Me through their word.*** (cf. John 17:20) He wants them to join those who act “differently” in an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ!

I remember a family conversation with our sons in high school. In the context of the discussion, my son, Mike, said, “You don’t want us to hang around the ‘bad’ people.” I immediately asked him where he heard such a thing. It was his impression that we had told him not to “hang around” the “bad” people. I responded: “Mike, hear me. We want you to hang around the ‘bad’ people.” He looked at me as if dazed by my words. Then I concluded: “If you don’t hang around the ‘bad’ people how will they ever know about Jesus? You don’t join in their sin but to do hang around them to tell them about Jesus.” Jesus sends us into the world as people who are not of the world so that we can share the saving message of Jesus which is for the whole world. Amen.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

According to His great mercy,

He has caused us to be born again to a living hope

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,

kept in heaven for you,

who by God’s power are being guarded through faith

for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

(1 Peter 1:3-5)

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