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## This Present Evil World

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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Before we proceed with the message, for the sake of any young Christians who may read it, and who have not yet studied the use of words in the New Testament, let us explain the one which is now to occupy us - the 'World'.

There are three main ways in which this word is used:

1. As to the material sphere which we call the earth.
2. As to the people who live on the earth.
3. As to the spiritual and moral system, order, economy, and principles which govern the people.

Peter has things to say as to the climax and destiny of No. 1. John three sixteen relates to No. 2: "God so loved the [people of this] world."

It is No. 3 that is the occasion of what follows here.

A reading of such passages of Scripture as John 17, John's Letters, Colossians 2:20, 3:1-2, Galatians 1:4, and many others such, will leave us in no doubt whatever that the New Testament designates this world system as evil, and that any spiritual relationship with it lies under God's judgment. It has always been so since the beginning, but we are now living in the full development of the fact, so

terribly and shockingly, that it is ripening fast for final destruction. The following message is very timely, and we trust that it will serve the solemn purpose of leading many to save themselves from "this present evil world", and will explain the spiritual conflict through which many are passing.

We shall gather up certain things which we find running through the whole of the Scriptures, and what we find throughout the Scriptures is, for our present purpose, an eightfold thing:

#### 1. AN ABIDING ANTAGONISM AND CLASH BETWEEN GOD AND THIS WORLD

I think that needs very little enlarging upon for the moment. Anyone who has any grasp of the Scriptures will be able instantly to recognize that that is so. From Cain - the man of the earth - right on through the whole of the Scriptures, you are brought to recognize that abiding antagonism and clash between God and this world.

#### 2. AN ABIDING EXPRESSION OF THAT ANTAGONISM BETWEEN THAT WHICH IS SPIRITUALLY RELATED TO GOD AND THIS WORLD

Anyone, any company, or anything spiritually related to God is found to be in the expression of that antagonism and that clash between God and this world, and that very relationship to God spiritually involves in the clash, involves in the antagonism.

#### 3. A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL AFFINITY WITH THIS WORLD IS SEEN TO BE IN MAN'S NATURE

A new constitutional affinity with this world is seen to be in man's nature, gravitating toward the world, like the point of the compass to the magnetic North. There is that which is in the very nature of man now as fallen which has an affinity with this world, and gravitates towards it, and the Scriptures reveal that that gravitation is of an inveterate character.

May I stay to make a parenthesis? No one is thinking that when I use the word 'world' I am just meaning the geographical sphere. You understand that the word 'world' is a very much bigger word as we use it spiritually than this geographical sphere. We use that word in its fullest meaning - an order of things here separated from God, organized and controlled by the evil one. That is the full meaning of 'kosmos'.

#### 4. A SPIRITUAL SYSTEM OF INTELLIGENCE

A spiritual system of intelligence as revealed by the Scriptures to be bent with all its might upon maintaining that affinity, and that relationship between man and this world.

#### 5. SPIRITUAL DEATH IS THE LAW WHICH GOVERNS THAT RELATIONSHIP

Spiritual death is the law which governs that relationship, and is the mainstay and master-hold of that system of spiritual intelligences. Let me repeat that: spiritual death is the law which governs that relationship, the relationship between fallen man and this world, and spiritual death is the mainstay and master-hold of those spiritual intelligences which are out to maintain that relationship between fallen man and this world.

6. TO SEVER THAT BOND, TO DESTROY THAT AFFINITY, TO INTRODUCE A COUNTER LAW OF GRAVITATION, IS THE ESSENCE OF THE WORK OF CHRIST

If you get that you get the heart of everything. That will explain everything. The work of the Lord Jesus in coming from heaven and fulfilling His mission here is, in its very essence, the severance of the bondage of man to this world, the destroying of fallen man's affinity therewith, and the introducing into man of another law, which counters man's gravitation toward this fallen world, another law of gravitation, which is not world-ward spiritually.

7. THIS SEVERANCE, THIS INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW SPIRITUAL LAW OF HEAVENLY GRAVITATION, IS ALWAYS MARKED BY A MOST INTENSE CONFLICT AT EVERY STAGE AND POINT

It is always fraught with deep spiritual suffering. You will never emancipate a people spiritually from this world except by intense conflict and through deep suffering.

8. THE METHOD IS THAT OF GOING INTO DEATH IN ORDER TO DESTROY DEATH, AND BEING IN THE WORLD IN ORDER TO OVERCOME THE WORLD

That is an outline, and if you were able to sit down with that prayerfully I am sure you would see that you have touched something which is of primary importance. Within the range of that everything with which you and I, as the Lord's children, have to do is gathered up. Now I am going on to take up one point. The work of Christ, the Cross in the work of Christ, and the purpose of His coming. That again is gathered up into eight things.

### **The Effect of Christ's Presence**

*Firstly: To once and for all register in an absolute and pre-eminent way that collision, that mutual antagonism between God and this world.* Christ's coming into this world, and Christ's work in this world in a way unparalleled, unprecedented, registered, made manifest, dragged out into the light, threw up into clear relief that fact that there is a mutual antagonism between God and this world. You can trace it through the Old Testament. It is quite clear there, but it is more or less local or localized in the Old Testament. When you come to the Lord Jesus coming into this world you have the universal factor, a universal Person set down in the midst of the universe, and universal forces focused upon Him. And because of who He is, because God is there in Christ, because this is no mere man, as in the case of the Old Testament, because this is "God with us", you find that from the very commencement of His career, His course, His time here on the earth, there broke out that smouldering volcano of antagonism: first through Herod, and then by another, and another, and another means, until in the end it seems that everything has conspired and converged to cast Him out of this world, as having no place in it, as being a menace to it.

Demons betrayed secrets, the full explanation of which is not in the Word of God: "Art thou come to destroy us before our time? I know thee who thou art, the Holy one of God", betraying deep mysteries concerning the destiny and the doom of that spiritual world, that world of spiritual intelligences. Men and demons worked together, and this hate showed itself. What a great deal He had to say Himself about it, and to what lengths He carried it, and into what realms - right into the heart of Judaism and its spiritual, religious citadel, the Scribes and the Pharisees: "Ye are of your father the devil"; "The works of your father ye do"; "Ye are from beneath; I am from above"; "If ye had known the Father ye would have known Me."

You see, He carried it right there into the highest realm of religious life as this world knew it, and finding there this deep-rooted antagonism, and dragging it out, making it impossible for that thing to go on being hidden, until at last, stung by His presence, it broke loose, and from that realm came His doom, so far as his course here on the earth was concerned as a man. Oh yes! everywhere this universal focal point: God in Christ making manifest as never before not locally, but universally, not merely on the earth, but in that spiritual realm - that there is a clash, a deep-seated and terrible clash between God and this world. And His coming was for that purpose. It is important for us to realize that it was necessary to expose that thing. It was essential that that thing should be dragged out, but, oh, that the people of God had sufficiently recognized and grasped and apprehended this thing!

Oh, dear friends, you and I, before we are through, will see the utter impossibility of that contradiction called 'a worldly Christian', 'a worldly Church'. If we do not see that now, well, the Lord help us! The very coming of the Lord Jesus into this world was, firstly, to manifest, as had never been manifested before in a universal way, that there is, right at the very heart of things spiritually, an antagonism between God and this world, and that world can never be reconciled to God. You have to use the word 'world' in another sense when speaking of reconciling the world; that is a more limited usage of the word, but that world of which we are speaking is beyond reconciliation. We shall see that as we go on.

Secondly. His coming was, while to register in an absolute and pre-eminent way that mutual antagonism, *to rescue an instrument from this world*, to secure an instrument in this world for this age, *embodying that antagonism*. Do you get the force of that? Did Christ come, first of all, to make the antagonism absolutely apparent? Yes! Then equally He came to secure an instrument in this world, for this age, which would embody that antagonism. That is, the instrument which Christ secures in this age, in this world, is going to be an age expression of the antagonism between God and this world. That means that if you and I are a part of God's instrument in this world, resultant from the work of the Lord Jesus in His Cross, you and I are going to be the embodiment of that antagonism; that is, there is going to be something about us which can have no compromise with this world, and which for ever stands in a position similar to that which the Lord Jesus occupies in relation to this world in the spiritual antagonism. And that instrument is going to feel the antagonism which He met, and is going to be conscious that this place, this world, is by no means a place of rest and abiding. "In the world ye shall have tribulation...". To get rid of that is to undo the work of the Lord Jesus: to try to get popularity in this world for Christianity, to escape the world's bitterest antagonism, is to counter all that the Lord Jesus came to do.

Now that is a terrific thing to say, but it is true. I made a note in my Testament from Martin Luther. He had a pictorial way, as you know, of presenting truth, and he did it both for the devil and for the Lord. In speaking about Matthew 5:10-12 he pictures the disciples of the Lord, the believers, arriving at the gates of heaven and being met there by the Lord Himself: and one of the questions which He asks each one who arrives, with which He interrogates every professed disciple, is this:

"Wert thou an abomination to the whole world as I and Mine have been from the foundation of the world?"

Well, the Lord's coming was to secure an instrument in this world for the age which would embody that mutual antagonism between God and this world. You see your calling, brethren. Does that

explain something? I think it explains a lot. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews has a way of putting it: "Of whom the world was not worthy." That is his verdict on the whole matter.

Thirdly. His coming was *to destroy for such (that is, such instrument) that law of death*. Note: firstly, to bring out into the clear light, which He Himself was, the reality, the depth of that mutual antagonism between God and the world; secondly, to take out of the world a people for Himself, yet to be in the world for the age as a representation of that antagonism; then, thirdly, to destroy for such that law, that mainstay, that master-hold of the powers of evil, to destroy him that had the power of death and to deliver them; to destroy the power of death for His own. He came to do that. It would be impossible for us to live here on God's side and on God's behalf, to meet all that antagonism of hell to God, unless Christ had accomplished the destroying of that masterhold of the devil - spiritual death.

Dear friends, you and I are becoming more and more conscious, are we not - many of us are - that the only possibility of staying in this world and on the earth is by the life which is triumphant over death, and unless we know more of that, this place is going to be impossible spiritually. Is that not true? It is! There is a real spiritual world with which we are in touch, but which we so dimly understand. What is the spiritual experience of those who are really going on with God? It is, on the one hand, of an intensified consciousness of death, and, on the other hand, a growing emphasis on the power of His resurrection. Is that true? I do not think there is any doubt about it. And this is not something which touches merely the spiritually aged and fully matured. I believe that the Lord would teach the younger folk this thing: those of you who would, perhaps, think that you are not old enough to understand and enter into these great spiritualities. I believe the Lord would teach you that you can know deliverance and victory in the realm of death by coming into a full apprehension of Him as your life, and, while the phraseology, the terminology may be difficult for you, the experience may be as clear and as simple as anything could be. The fact that those who are children of God - whether mature or immature - *ARE* children of God brings them into experiences which they might never have if they were not the Lord's children. The Lord does not save from going into those experiences, but in them draws out to Himself by a strong taking hold, when something very critical is threatened, and then Himself comes in, and it is something which is above what man can do, and they have learned their lesson. They have discovered that it is possible to live in this world, where death reigns, and to know victory in Christ by taking hold of Him as their life. He came that for His own He might destroy that law of death by which the god of this world, the prince of this world, holds his own in bondage, and by which he operates against the saints to try to bring them back into bondage, the bondage of death.

Fourthly. His coming was *to set up His instrument, redeemed from the world, that counter-law of a heavenly life*, to introduce something else into their constitution. The constitutional law of the unredeemed from the world, of those who are of this world, is bondage to the world. They see nothing beyond the horizon of this world, and all the time the world holds them and carries them on. The tides of worldliness carry this world on, and to try to stem those tides is an impossible thing until something has happened by which there comes about the realization of this: "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", the introduction of that which is an adequate countering to the mighty gravitating affinity in man's nature toward the world. He came to set that up in His own, and here that big difference is recognized, which has been so often pointed out - that if you really do become begotten of God, born from above, there is put into you the life of God. You do not have to give up the world, there is not a struggle to break with this anew that and something else, and you never have to sit down and say: 'I suppose now that I am a Christian I have to give up this and that,

and I must not go here and I must not go there.' You never have that sort of thing at all: you find a counter-gravitation, you find that something else has come in which has made that kind of gravitation comparatively weak, and your heart is now in other directions, drawn to other things. You may test your spiritual life by that.

Now, young people, let me say a word to you. Perhaps sometime in your superficial thinking and imagining you think the world has a better time than you do, and that you would like to have a little more of what the world has. I put it to you: make up your mind to go and have it. *IF YOU ARE A TRUE CHILD OF GOD*, start off, and see how far down the road you get. You will not get there. You will turn round and come back. What is the matter with you? Well, something has happened in spite of your thinking and your imagining and those superficial feelings - many of them, perhaps, the fruit of the severe time which you have because of spiritual antagonism. In spite of all that you cannot go very far in that way. You know the parable of the squirrel; you know that the gravitation is upward. Although you might just jump down to get a nut, it is not your place. The Lord came to do that, and it is the strategy of the Lord never to say that you must not go there and you must not do this. He puts something into you - a counter-gravitation, a mighty work, which the Lord has accomplished.

Fifthly. *To gather out from the world spiritually a people for His coming Kingdom.* Not to take them away from the world. That would be very nice, but He would take them out from the world spiritually, so that He has here in the world His Kingdom spiritually represented by them. And He is gathering out from the nations spiritually now; a spiritual out-gathering, detachment, a people for that coming Kingdom. He came to do that, and He has made it perfectly clear that His Kingdom is not of this world and is not of things seen and handled. "I would have you know, brethren," said the apostle, "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom." His Kingdom is now a spiritual thing in the hearts of those who have been taken out of the kingdom of darkness and translated into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. That is a thing already done. A day will come when He will translate them from this world while He deals with the rest, and purges this world and makes it fit for the habitation of saints, without any antagonism. He came to do that. He is doing it. We know it in our own hearts. That is exactly what has happened with us. We are not of the world. Our life "is hid with Christ in God." We look for a Saviour.

Sixthly. *The whole course of spiritual experience is progressive detachment from the world and attachment to Christ.* It is a course of spiritual history. It is a progressive thing, and not that in the very commencement of our spiritual life we were not severed from the world. We were fundamentally and originally separated from the world, but you and I know quite well that our experience has been all in the direction of this world becoming less and less, and Christ becoming more and more and more. "Whom having not seen, we love." "Where our treasure is, there our heart is also." We know something of the words: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is...". "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." We know that that is going on in us.

Seventhly. *The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit are the basic factors in this work of Christ.* Let me repeat it. The death, the resurrection, the ascension of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit are *THE* factors, the basic factors, in this work of the Lord. His death is basic, and we are told that His death is to be entered into by us in faith. "Ye died...". That means we were crucified to the world and the world unto us in Christ. The resurrection of Christ is a basic factor in this work. It means that we stand on resurrection ground and are outside of the world. He never appeared personally to the world again after His death. He will one day, but He has not done

so yet. So far as this age is concerned, He is not on that level at all. He is outside of the world, and for the age all His own, standing with Him in resurrection, are there spiritually. His ascension means that everything now for this age for His own is heaven-ward and not of this world. The anointing of the Holy Spirit will lead us progressively, ever more and more, away from the world to Christ, revealing His things. These are the basic factors in this great work which He has come to do.

Eighthly. *The Church is called to be the collective embodiment of all that truth.* The Church is called to be the collective - the corporate - embodiment of that full, absolute antagonism between God and the world. I realize that is a tremendous thing to say in the face of what is called the Church, in the face of what we know to be associated with what is called the Church. One hesitates in the almost hopeless situation that immediately confronts you when you raise the standard like that. Are we to conclude that what is called the Church is not the Church? At any rate, let us challenge ourselves on that. We can do no more than proclaim the truth and seek that it shall be realized in ourselves. It is not for us to go out and denounce or to judge, we must proclaim. But, oh! it does raise some very serious questions for many of the Lord's people. To be in any way entangled with that thing, that awful thing spiritually, against which God as in Christ has been revealed to be so utterly set! To be entangled in that through religion, through Christianity, through what is called the Church! You know quite well that if you stand on that ground you will meet the antagonism of the scribes and pharisees.

The Church is called to be the corporate expression of that antagonism, of that impact, by which Christ has destroyed the power of death, and living in the power of His resurrection. The Church is called to reveal in itself that it is not of this world and that it is moving steadily further and further away from the world, because Christ is becoming more and more its life; to be the embodiment of all that is meant by the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the ascension of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt but that that is how it was at the beginning. Are we to say that that is gone for ever, and that that can never be? No, we cannot say that. We may have to come within a very limited realm, but I verily believe that when the Lord comes, and there is that blessed movement toward Himself of the overcomers, He will have in them the embodiment of all that. They will represent all that.

For myself I cannot see translation possible on any other ground. Is the Lord going to translate this world to heaven? Never! If you are spiritually bound up with it - when I say 'spiritually' I mean bound up with it in heart, a heart link - I do not know what will happen. It seems to me to be so distinctly contradictory to the law of Christ's work. The work of the Lord Jesus marks the utter detachment from this world, and the consummation is simply the crown of that which has already taken place spiritually, the seal upon what has been done spiritually. That is how I see it, but I know the many difficulties that come up there.

Now let us close, so far as this broad survey is concerned, by just putting our finger upon one or two points. Do you see now why there must be no personal interests on the part of the people of God? What are personal interests? They are worldly in essence, in nature. It is what Paul spoke of when he said: "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." That personal element runs out into so many directions, and is so imperceptible in many things, that only the Lord can bring it to light and destroy it. Do you see, on the face of it, why there must be no personal interest, and that there must be such an utterness of abandonment to the Lord's interests, and that anything other than that is a spiritual link with this world? The enemy can come in and destroy your testimony if you have any personal interests, even in the work of the Lord. Deeper than we recognize there are

those things which represent our like and our dislike, our want and our not want, our going to have and our not going to have, all of which give rise to suspicion of others, and then suspicion moves silently and imperceptibly on to jealousy, and jealousy on to a breakdown in fellowship. Tracked right down to its source it was some personal element, wanting it as we want it, wanting it ourselves, and not the utter emptying of self; and in the long run, sooner or later, the enemy has made an awful havoc because there was his link. Do you now see why?

When the Lord really gets a complete mastery of the life, He works to have everything carried on to resurrection ground. That is, He takes everything through a depth and a death, where we lose it, and then in a deep crisis, in which we are brought to the point in heart of letting that go to God, not reproaching God, not rebelling against God, not refusing to accept God's way, but where we come to the place where our heart is one with the heart of God over that matter; then so often the Lord gives that back, but it has come back in a new realm. It has gone through death and it comes back by resurrection, and there is something in it now which is not of this world. It is not a time thing, nor merely an earthly or natural thing. There is something about it now which has God in it. It is on resurrection ground, and the world factor in it has been destroyed. Now that is a true spiritual law. Do you see why the Lord must have it that way?

Let me put that in another way. This is why everything must be brought through to the place where it is wholly for God. Everything has to be wholly for God. The apostle had something to say about the shortness of the time, and those who had wives being as those who had none. Do you think he meant that literally? Ignore your domestic responsibilities, or ignore something which was of God, or ride rough shod over it for what you call spiritual things? Never! A thousand times, never! What the apostle meant was this: you have to hold everything in the light of God's interests, and if you are holding domestic relationships, or anything else here on this earth, on a natural level, where they are for yourself, for time, and for what they mean to you merely in this life - and that is the range of things - well, that is wrong. Everything has to be held for God, in the light of the Lord's interests. Why? To have that link with this world and the natural life absolutely destroyed so that the power of spiritual death cannot operate there. Do you not know that when you as a believer, as a spiritual person, or I, touch things naturally we touch spiritual death? Have you no experience of that? The power triumphant over death is in having everything wholly for the Lord and not for ourselves, not for this world, not for this life. Everything has to be held for the Lord.

It is so easy to sing hymns of consecration. We can sing about being all for the Lord, and having everything for the Lord, and we can answer to such challenges, but now let us face it. Are we holding everything for the Lord? Have we got something which, if we would only let that go, would in some other life give the Lord larger interests? Are we taking this attitude: 'Now, while this thing means much to me, while in a natural way I have deep sentimentalities with this, and it is not easy to let things go, nevertheless, if the Lord is going to get more by my letting go, giving up, well, that is the thing that counts and that matters.' That is holding things for the Lord. Are we holding things for the Lord? If we are holding things for ourselves, if we are holding things in this life before those heavenly interests of the Lord, we are opening the door to spiritual death. We cannot grow spiritually; we become earthbound, and our spiritual progress is delayed, if not utterly arrested. Everything must be carried over on to resurrection ground, and be wholly for the Lord, wholly for heaven. "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." There is so much bound up with this.

Now do you understand the meaning of suffering? I ask you, those of you who have suffered as the Lord's children, what has been the effect of your suffering? That is, inasmuch as you have not been



persistently rebellious and hard because of the suffering, but inasmuch as you have sought to be one with the Lord in your suffering, what has been the effect of it? Answer me: has it been to make this world much less and the Lord much more, the things of heaven much more? Is that not true? This world has lost its grip, perhaps its charm, its hold. The things which are above have become far more to you through your suffering. Well, do you see the meaning of suffering? Do you see what the Lord is doing? Why does He empty us out? Why does He pour us out to the last drop? Just so that He can pour in, that is all. Just so that heavenly things may take the place of natural, earthly things. The Lord permits His people to suffer in order that that gravitation world-ward might be weakened, and that that power of death might be destroyed: that they may become a heavenly people, living by a life which is His own life, and which it takes full spiritual intelligences to appreciate.

That is the testimony of Christ triumphant, but you cannot recognize that with the human mind. You need a full spiritual intelligence to grasp that. It is only principalities and powers who are able adequately to register the power of His resurrection. They recognize it. So the Church goes on in suffering, in weaknesses, in infirmity, "in deaths oft"; but the Church will finish its course, and the issue will be that the full measure of that law of death operating in this world was taken by Christ in His Church and triumphed over. He is doing something through our weakness. We do not see it nor feel it, and we very often forget all about it in the presence of the suffering, but He is doing something, that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies should be displayed this manifold wisdom of God. That is the meaning of suffering - the raising of a heavenly testimony: getting us away from the world and making us live by a life which is hid with Christ in God.

Do you see the utter impossibility of being all the Lord's and having any kind of heart association with this world? That ought to come home to us in a new way.