

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 25

KEY TERMS: WORLD, PART 2

The next word to consider in the Greek New Testament concerning the world is κόσμος. The first and original meaning had to do with order or arrangement; it is referring to the universe as an ordered structure. It refers to the material creation, the earth, as created by God according to an ordered design, plan, and arrangement. It also can refer to the world as the sphere or place of human life, the earth. Third, it can stand as a figurative reference to humanity, those who inhabit the world. Finally, it is used in a bad ethical sense in which unregenerate humanity is subject to being governed through the order and arrangement of Satan. Many of the New Testament verses that use αἰών are using it in this final sense of κόσμος.

The word can refer to the earth rather than to the universe or to the world. In Romans 4:13, Abraham was not said to be considering the entire universe to be his inheritance. He would have understood his inheritance to include the land of Israel through his physical descendants and probably to include all the nations of the world or earth who would be spiritually blessed through him and thereby become his spiritual descendants. Romans 4:13 ¹³For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world [κόσμος] was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

“Being ‘heir of the world’ probably refers to ‘all peoples on earth’ (Gen. 12:3), ‘all nations’ (Gen. 22:18), for through Abraham and his descendants all the world is blessed. He is thus their ‘father’ and they are his heirs” [John A. Witmer, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 454]. This promise is an earthbound promise and “earth” may have been a better translation, but we understand what it is saying without much problem when it uses “world.”

Κόσμος also refers to the entire created order, the universe.

Acts 17:24 ²⁴“The God who made the world [κόσμος] and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

In this Scripture, Jesus is presented as the Lord of heaven and earth so in context κόσμος is referring to the entire created order.

The word identifies the sphere of human life and Paul used it that way in Romans 3:19.

Romans 3:19 ¹⁹Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world [κόσμος] may become accountable to God;

Paul has just written that every person is under condemnation and “all the world” is referring to all people. This is a sweeping condemnation of all mankind, that is, “all the world.” This Scripture is presenting the concept that κόσμος can refer to humanity as people residing in this created order on planet earth.

There is a world system that is evil and in the control of Satan and κόσμος can also refer to this system. This evil, satanic world system will reach its peak during the Tribulation as economic, religious, and governmental Babylon, but the foundation for it is being laid right now in this age and never more so than in our lifetime.

Colossians 2:8, 20 ⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world [κόσμος], rather than according to Christ... ²⁰If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world [κόσμος], why, as if you were living in the world [κόσμος], do you submit yourself to decrees...

This world is subject to the false teaching of deceptive, evil spiritual forces that seem to be gathering steam as we approach the end. These things are contrary to Christ and believers, that is, those who are in Christ, are to have no part in them. The thinking of this age is thoroughly grounded in secular humanist thought which is opposed to God's thinking. The thinking of the world flows from an evil fountain of force, greed, selfishness, and pleasure. It can appear to be gentle and decent but in reality it is the beast, or at least the forerunner of that beast, Daniel described. All the political, economic, and religious structures outside the true church are organized to honor and exalt human thought which today is grounded on evolution and on humanist thought and philosophy all of which is ultimately sourced in Satan. Divine revelation is not only disregarded today, it is distorted, denied, and openly disdained. There is an active apostate church that is now deceiving many people. This false church is subservient to this evil spirit of the age and the evil force energizing this age is the prince and power of the air (Eph. 2:2), the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4), Satan. Κόσμος is a word perfectly suited to describe the evil spirit of this age that pervades the world and is guiding it to the end of history as we know it.

The next Greek word that refers to world is οἰκουμένη meaning the earth or the inhabited world. This word can be applied in a political sense in that it can, and often does in the Bible, refer to the Roman Empire. “This word in Scripture usage sometimes has a limited meaning, being coextensive with the Roman Empire at its zenith” [C. I. Scofield, *Scofield*

Bible Correspondence Course, p. 5:1386]. In Luke 2:1, the reference is to the Roman territories ruled by Rome in order that a census could be taken for Roman taxation purposes. Context is the key to translating this word because it can also refer to the earth and to the inhabited world. The KJV translated this word as “world” and to English speaking people, that interpretation is not really addressing the meaning of the verse because we tend to interpret this word to mean all the nations and people of the entire planet. The NET Bible is closest to rendering the true meaning of the word when translates it “empire” which is a reference to the Roman Empire that Caesar Augustus was ruling at the time. Caesar had no interest in taxing the entire world and he had no authority to do it even if he wanted to do it.

Luke 2:1 [NASB] ¹Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth [οἰκουμένη].

Luke 2:1 [KJV] ¹And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world [οἰκουμένη] should be taxed.

Luke 2:1 [NET] ¹Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus to register all the empire [οἰκουμένη] for taxes.

“To be sure, for NT writers ‘the world’ would have meant primarily *their* world—the culture of which they were a part. Thus, in most instances, even when a broad meaning is evident, ἡ οἰκουμένη indicates first and foremost ‘the world of the heathen Graeco-Roman Empire threatened by the powers of darkness’” [M. Paeslack quoted in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s. v. “οἰκουμένη”].

The Lord used οἰκουμένη to refer to the inhabited earth that is about to undergo an hour of testing. Note that the Lord connected the use of the word with the people dwelling on earth.

Revelation 3:10 ¹⁰‘Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world [οἰκουμένη], to test those who dwell on the earth.

The final word is γῆ and it has various meanings with the primary meaning the earth or the inhabited earth. It can mean soil, ground, and land as distinct from bodies of water whether lakes or the sea. It can have political connotations by referring to a country, region, or territory.

Revelation 13:3 ³ saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth [γῆ] was amazed and followed after the beast;

Understanding the concept of the world as it relates to this age is important in order to understand not only Soteriology but Christianity as well. Paul's condemnation of Demas was because Demas loved this age, not this world as it is so often translated, more than he loved Paul and his ministry.

2 Timothy 4:10¹⁰for Demas, having loved this present world [αἰῶν], has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica...

We must understand that this age is thoroughly evil in character. It is not a commendable Christian character trait for a believer to love this age more than Christ and Christianity is loved by that believer. One of the problems we have to confront is that this evil age has permeated the church. Emissaries of this age in the news media, the government, the entertainment industry, and even in the seminaries and pulpits of the church have saturated the atmosphere within the walls of the church with secular humanist thought and pagan theology. False teachers are preaching the spirit of this age rather than the gospel of the Christ and sound doctrine and many people are being deceived. Can you imagine standing before the Lord at the Bema knowing that you loved this age more than you loved Him? Many Christian people are going to do just that. Even worse, knowing that He who searches the heart and knows all things knows that you loved this age more than you loved Him. That's not a pleasant thought and it behooves every believer to examine their worldview and their innermost being in order to assess their relationship with and their involvement in this present evil age.

In His high priestly prayer, Jesus made it clear that believers are not of this world. He applied this not only to the eleven apostles who were His immediate audience but He applied to all believers throughout this age. If we are not of this world, then what profit is it to us to live like we are part of this world? We are hated simply because we are believers and we will always be hated. The true church will never be loved by those who are enmeshed in this evil world system. Why would we try to please a world that hates us? Shouldn't we rather be about pleasing the Lord who saved us?

John 17:20²⁰"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;

John 15:19¹⁹"If you were of the world [κόσμος], the world [κόσμος] would love its own; but because you are not of the world [κόσμος], but I chose you out of the world [κόσμος], because of this the world [κόσμος] hates you.

John 17:14–16¹⁴"I have given them Your word; and the world [κόσμος] has hated them, because they are not of the world [κόσμος], even as I am not of the world [κόσμος].¹⁵"I

do not ask You to take them out of the world [κόσμος], but to keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶“They are not of the world [κόσμος], even as I am not of the world [κόσμος].

The Lord is using κόσμος in two ways here. First, in some cases, He is referring to the created order in which human beings exist. Second, He is referring to this world as the place which is governed in a bad ethical sense in which unregenerate humanity is subject to being governed through the order and arrangement of Satan. Adam willingly gave up his right to rule the earth when he disobeyed God and listened to Satan. To the extent God allows it, Satan is in charge of the world system as it has existed throughout history and he is the epitome of the spirit of this age. It is still his domain today and he is still guiding the world according to his evil spirit.

2 Corinthians 4:4 ⁴in whose case the god of this world [αἰών] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Paul did not really say Satan is the god of this world, although that is true; he said he is the god of this age. The fact remains, however, that Satan has been the god of this world from the time of Adam's sin. He is the spiritual force behind the deception rampant in this present age. The entire world as it is inhabited by mankind is ensconced in darkness and Satan is working to keep it that way. In our understanding of the English language, the word “world” doesn't seem to convey the spiritual dimensions of αἰών that “age” conveys. That's why I think “age,” depending on context, is the better translation of αἰών and gives us a better understanding of the meaning the original language is trying to convey.

Ephesians 2:2 ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world [κόσμος] according to the prince [ἄρχων] of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Only justification removes a human being from subjection to Satan and to the course of this age. All of us have given our allegiance to Satan, the prince of the power of the air, and his world system. We were once all sons of disobedience and subject to the spirit who works in and through unbelievers. That ends only when a person places their faith in Christ Jesus. “Not only is the standard of the unregenerate in accordance with the temporal values of the world, but it is also in accordance with or under the control of the ruler of the realm of the air....the unregenerate not only walk according to the values of the present age but also under the control of the leader who rules over this evil world....the unregenerate Ephesians walked according to the values of the present age. Not only were they in step with the world, but they also went according to the wishes of the ruler (the devil) who is in control of the spiritual atmosphere and that spirit

is presently working in the sons of disobedience. Since the world system is controlled by the devil, it is not surprising that the unregenerate do what the rest of the world does. Furthermore, the unconverted not only are under the pressure of the world system and its commander's control, but they also enjoy it..." [Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 311-316]. The point is that we are no longer subject to this prince of the power of the air and we should no longer live like we are. The world should see a difference in our behavior and in our relationship to that same unbelieving world as it exists in this present evil age. The unfortunate fact is that many believers have been unable or unwilling to completely leave the world system and they are trying to live their lives in both places. That is not possible.

It is characteristic of this age that the world hates Christianity with a blind, irrational, satanically inspired rage that is very evident today. Any Christian who is loved and adored by the world is probably doing something wrong. Think Joel Osteen here; he is a modern secular media darling because he refuses to condemn sin. He never preaches sound doctrine. He never tells anyone they are a sinner in need of a Savior. He preaches a message of self-esteem prosperity instead of the message of the Christ. For these reasons, he is embraced by the world system. You cannot distinguish Joel Osteen's message from the message of the age. You may well say, "What about men like Billy Graham; he was loved by everyone?" Perhaps he was loved to that extent but perhaps not. It's likely true that part of his seeming popularity was due to some famous people associating with Billy Graham for cover which provided publicity for both of them; associating with Graham made them look like they were Christians and it made Graham appear to be very popular with the world and its important people. However, we mustn't forget that it wasn't long into his ministry until he started embracing a more universalist view of gospel doctrine. Perhaps that's why he became so popular. Mother Theresa was, and still is, adored by the world but at best she was a universalist who believed all religions lead to God and at worst she denied God's existence. Certainly, as a Roman Catholic she believed in faith plus works. The point is if the world loves you, then you are probably a person of the world who belongs to the world. At the very least if you are a believer and the world loves you, then you are probably more involved in the world system than you are in the things of the Lord. We all need to examine our lives and determine where we stand in the eyes of the world. Do the people of the world who are around you know that by the way you live your life, by your words, and by your actions, that you are a born again believer in Christ Jesus?

1 John 5:19 ¹⁹We know that we are of God, and that the whole world [κόσμος] lies in the power of the evil one.

1 John 4:5 ⁵They are from the world [κόσμος]; therefore they speak as from the world [κόσμος], and the world [κόσμος] listens to them.

“The cosmos is a vast order or system that Satan has promoted, which conforms to his ideals, aims, and methods. It is civilization now functioning apart from God—a civilization in which none of its promoters really expect God to share, who assign to God no consideration in respect to their projects; nor do they ascribe any causativity to Him. This system embraces its godless governments, conflicts, armaments, jealousies, its education, culture, religions of morality, and pride. It is that sphere in which man lives. It is what he sees, what he employs. To the uncounted multitude it is all they ever know so long as they live on this earth. It is properly styled *the satanic system*, which phrase is in many instances a justified interpretation of the so-meaningful word, *cosmos*. It is literally a *cosmos diabolicus*” [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 2:77-78].

Isn't it telling that the only religious system the world hates is Christianity and that is the very system that has done the most good for the world that hates it? Isn't it telling that truth can only be found in Christianity yet other religions are embraced and Christianity is not only rejected but it is hated and despised? Christians are the first people since the ancient Jews to care for widows, orphans, and the ill; they are not a force of evil in this age. The reason Christians are hated is because they represent the Truth, Christ Jesus. Every other religious system is false and the world embraces all that is false. The world system recognizes that false religious systems are part of their system and no threat to them; therefore, they are free and more than willing to recognize and cooperate with the false religious systems of this age. The world knows the truth and the world hates the truth. Their hatred is so intense it is irrational. Christianity is being banned from the public consciousness while all other religions are allowed to be openly declared and practiced in the public sphere. In California, a school district is requiring students, including Christian students, to participate in yoga and a judge has ruled that yoga is not a religious activity. That's irrational and it is not factual; yoga is, in fact, a religious activity. In Colorado, a baker who refused to create a wedding cake for a so-called homosexual wedding was found guilty of discrimination. He decided to test the system and he went to a few bakeries owned by homosexuals and tried to commission a cake made to look like a Bible with verses written on it rebuking sin. He was refused and the same tribunal that censured him ruled it acceptable that these bakeries refuse to decorate Christian themed cakes. That's irrational. Christianity is being omitted from text books and Islam is being taught in a favorable manner in public schools as a peaceful religion. That's irrational. Feminists say not one word about the horrible treatment of women in Islam but they condemn Christianity as being patriarchal and discriminating against women because the Bible doesn't allow women to be pastors and because God has instituted separate roles for men and women within His created order and according to His divine design. That's irrational. The constitutional prohibition on the establishment of a state religion has been replaced by the so-called “separation of church and state” and has been redefined from that prohibition on the establishment of a state religion to a prohibition on any display of Christianity within the governmental

sphere. In relation to the facts of the founding of our country, that is irrational. Christian chaplains in the military are prohibited from citing the Bible's prohibitions on homosexuality and they are forbidden to pray in Jesus' name. In effect, they are demanding that these pastors deny the faith they were hired to represent. That's irrational. Christians are now routinely told they cannot pray in Jesus' name in public venues such as the opening of city council meetings and state legislative bodies. That's irrational; we are commanded to pray in Jesus' name. And so it goes.... All these edicts are not the result of rational thought processes; they are the result of satanically influenced thought processes. These things are irrational, illogical, and even unconstitutional and illegal but that is a perfect representation of the humanist worldview as it operates in this age.

Freedom of religion is taking on a new meaning in today's America. Freedom of religion is now redefined to allow people to worship as they see fit in their homes and in their places of worship but that freedom does not include proclamation in the public sphere. When you hear secular humanist politicians in America speak about religious freedom today, that is their real, intended meaning. They believe they can dictate to the true church where, when, and how to practice their Christianity. Do not be deceived.

It is not God's plan to remove Christians from the world the moment they first believe. It is his plan for Christians to be His ambassadors in a hostile, satanic world environment in order to represent Him, to evangelize the world, to glorify Him, and to bear spiritual fruit. Positionally, we are already with the Lord in the heavenly places and that is where our blessings are found. Experientially, we are in this world while not being of this world in order to serve Him and do His will.

2 Corinthians 5:20²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors [πρεσβεύω] for Christ...

Philippians 3:20²⁰For our citizenship is in heaven...

Ambassadors are people who travel from their home country to a foreign country in order to represent their people and their government in that foreign land. The Greek word simply means to be an older, senior person or to function as a representative of a ruling authority. In English, the word means, in general, "a person who acts as a representative or promoter of a specified activity" and in particular, "an accredited diplomat sent by a country as its official representative to a foreign country" [*The Oxford American College Dictionary*, s. v. "ambassador."] That is what Paul was writing about to the Corinthians. Our ruling authority is Christ and we represent Him and His Church to the people and the nations of the world. Inherent in the definition of ambassador is that this inhabited world is not our home; this world is our place of service. We are here to do a job as we represent Christ Jesus. Concerning Soteriology, a

major part of our service is preaching the gospel to a lost world that desperately needs to hear it. If we, as believers, become part of the world system, we have departed from our true home and gone over to the side of the enemy and taken up residence with him. In that capacity, we are not only worthless, we are counterproductive. What do the people of the world think when they see a Christian who talks and acts no differently than they talk and act? They think they don't need Christ and Christianity because they see no difference between what and who they are and what and who these worldly believers are.

Ephesians 2:6 ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

We who were dead have been made alive with Christ and positionally we are in Him and with Him where He is. That's our true home. That's a difficult concept for us to understand because experientially, we are still here in the world. We are here to represent Him and to do good works in His name.

Ephesians 1:3 ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

“The spiritual gifts, wisdom, and spiritual persons are to aid the believer to function on this earth in the present time. For a believer to live effectively in society, he or she needs benefits that have their source in God. So God has blessed the believer with every spiritual benefit necessary for his or her spiritual well-being....the spiritual blessings are from the heavenly places or realms and for the benefit of the believer here and now....in receiving the spiritual benefit from the heavenly places it is in the midst of satanic attack and interference. The spiritual benefits for the believers are from the heavenlies and the unbelievers' opposition to the believers find their source in wicked spiritual leaders who also reside in the heavenlies. In other words, the struggles in the heavenlies are also played out on earth. Hence, the believers reside on earth having been enriched with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies necessary for their spiritual well-being....The believer, who is united with Christ who is in heaven, partakes of the spiritual benefits from the heavenlies....God is praised because he has enriched believers with every spiritual benefit in the heavenlies in Christ. To declare the believer blessed implies that the spiritual benefits have been given. However, though spiritual benefits have been given, believers need to appropriate them....Although God had promised the people of Israel material prosperity and physical protection, he has not promised this for the believer in this age. Rather, he has promised every spiritual benefit for the entire spiritual well-being of the believer” [Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 168-172].