

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST'S PEOPLE

NO. 78

A SERMON
 DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 22, 1855
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 AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK

“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”
John 17:16

CHRIST'S prayer was for a special people. He declared that He did not offer a universal intercession. “I pray for *them*,” said He. “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine.” In reading this beautiful prayer through, only one question arises to our minds, who are the people that are described as “them” or as “they”?

Who are these favored individuals who share a Savior's prayers, are recognized by a Savior's love, have their names written on the stones of His precious breastplate, and have their characters and their circumstances mentioned by the lips of the High Priest before the throne on high? The answer to that question is supplied by the words of our text.

The people for whom Christ prays are an unearthly people. They are a people somewhat above the world, distinguished altogether from it. “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

I shall treat my text, first of all, *doctrinally*. Secondly, *experientially*. And thirdly, *practically*.

I. First, we shall take our text and look at it DOCTRINALLY.

The doctrine of it is that God's people are a people who are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world. It is not so much that they are not of the world, as that they are, “not of the world, *even as Christ was not of the world*.” This is an important distinction, for there are to be found certain people who are not of the world, and yet they are not Christians.

Amongst them I would mention sentimentalists—people who are always crying and groaning in affected sentimental ways. Their spirits are so refined, their characters are so delicate, that they could not attend to ordinary business. They would think it rather degrading to their spiritual nature to attend to anything connected with the world.

They live much in the air of romances and novels. They love to read things that fetch tears from their eyes. They would like to continually live in a cottage near a wood or to inhabit some quiet cave where they could read, “Zimmerman on Solitude” forever, for they feel that they are “not of the world.” The fact is, there is something too flimsy about them to stand the wear and tear of this wicked world. They are so pre-eminently good that they cannot bear to do as we poor human creatures do.

I have heard of one young lady who thought herself so spiritually-minded that she could not work. A very wise minister said to her, “That is quite correct! You are so spiritually-minded that you cannot work. Very well, you are so spiritually-minded that you shall not eat unless you do.” That brought her back from her great spiritual-mindedness.

There is a stupid sentimentalism that certain persons nurse themselves into. They read a parcel of books that intoxicate their brains and then fancy that they have a lofty destiny. These people are “not of the world,” truly. But the world does not want them and the world would not miss them much if they were clean gone forever. There is such a thing as being “not of the world,” from a high order of sentimentalism and yet not being a Christian after all. For it is not so much being “not of the world,” as being “not of the world, *even as Christ was not of the world*.”

There are others, too, like your monks and those other mad individuals of the Catholic church, who are not of the world. They are so awfully good that they could not live with us sinful creatures at all. They must be distinguished from us altogether. They must not wear, of course, a boot that would at all

approach to a worldly shoe, but they must have a sole of leather strapped on with two or three thongs, like the far-famed Father Ignatius. They could not be expected to wear worldly coats and waistcoats, but they must have peculiar garbs, cut in certain fashions, like the Passionists. They must wear particular dresses, particular garments, particular habits.

And we know that some men are “not of the world” by the peculiar mouthing they give to all their words—the sort of sweet, savory, buttery flavor they give to the English language, because they think themselves so eminently sanctified that they fancy it would be wrong to indulge in anything in which ordinary mortals indulge. Such persons are, however, reminded that their being, “not of the world,” has nothing to do with it. It is not being “not of the world,” so much as being “not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world.”

This is the distinguishing mark—being different from the world in those respects in which Christ was different. Not making ourselves singular in unimportant points, as those poor creatures do, but being different from the world in those respects in which the Son of God and the Son of man, Jesus Christ, our glorious Exemplar, was distinguished from the rest of mankind.

And I think this will burst out in great clearness and beauty to us, if we consider that Christ was not of the world in nature, that He was not of the world again, in office, and above all, that He was not of the world in His character.

1. First, *Christ was not of the world in nature.* What was there about Christ that was worldly? In one point of view His nature was divine, and as divine, it was perfect, pure, unsullied, spotless, He could not descend to things of earthliness and sin. In another sense He was human, and His human nature, which was born of the Virgin Mary, was begotten of the Holy Ghost, and therefore was so pure that in it rested nothing that was worldly.

He was not like we ordinary men. We are all born with worldliness in our hearts. Solomon well says, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.” It is not only there, but it is bound up in it. It is tied up in his heart and is difficult to remove. And so with each of us. When we were children, earthliness and carnality were bound up in our nature.

But Christ was not so. His nature was not a worldly one. It was essentially different from that of everyone else, although He sat down and talked with them. Mark the difference! He stood side by side with a Pharisee, but everyone could see He was not of the Pharisee's world. He sat by a Samaritan woman, and though He conversed with her very freely, who is it that fails to see that He was not of that Samaritan woman's world—not a sinner like her?

He mingled with the Publicans, nay, He sat down at the Publican's feast, and ate with Publicans and sinners. But you could see by the holy actions and the peculiar gestures He there carried with Him, that he was not of the Publicans' world, though He mixed with them.

There was something so different in His nature that you could not have found an individual in all the world whom you could have set beside Him and said, “There! he is of that man's world.” Nay, not even John, though he leaned on His bosom and partook very much of his Lord's Spirit, was exactly of that world to which Jesus belonged. For even he once, in his Boanergean spirit, said words to this effect, “Let us call down fire from heaven on the heads of those who oppose you”—a thing that Christ could not endure for a moment and thereby proved that He was something even beyond John's world.

Well, beloved, in some sense, the Christian is not of the world even in his nature. I do not mean in his corrupt and fallen nature, but in his new nature. There is something in a Christian that is utterly and entirely distinct from that of anybody else. Many persons think that the difference between a Christian and a worldling consists in this, one goes to chapel twice on a Sabbath-day, another does not go but once, or perhaps not at all.

One of them takes the sacrament, the other does not. One pays attention to holy things, the other pays very little attention to them. But ah, beloved, that does not make a Christian. The distinction between a Christian and a worldling is not merely external, but internal. The difference is one of nature and not of act.

A Christian is as essentially different from a worldling as a dove is from a raven, or a lamb from a lion. He is not of the world even in his nature. You could not make him a worldling, You might do what you liked, you might cause him to fall into some temporary sin, but you could not make him a worldling. You might cause him to backslide, but you could not make him a sinner, as he used to be.

He is not of the world by his nature. He is a twice-born man. In his veins run the blood of the royal family of the universe. He is a nobleman. He is a heaven-born child. His freedom is not merely a bought one, but he has his liberty by his new-born nature. He is begotten again unto a lively hope. He is not of the world by his nature. He is essentially and entirely different from the world.

There are persons in this chapel now who are more totally distinct from one another than you can even conceive. I have some here who are intelligent and some who are ignorant. Some who are rich and some who are poor. But I do not allude to those distinctions, they all melt away into nothing in that great distinction—dead or alive, spiritual or carnal, Christian or worldling. And oh! if you are God's people, then you are not of the world in your nature, for you are "not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world."

2. Again *you are not of the world in your office*. Christ's office had nothing to do with worldly things. "Are you a king then?" Yes, I am a king, but My kingdom is not of this world. "Are you a priest?" Yes, I am a Priest, but My Priesthood is not the priesthood which I shall soon lay aside, or which shall be discontinued as that of others has been. "Are you a teacher?" Yes, but My doctrines are not the doctrines of morality, doctrines that concern earthly dealings between man and man simply. My doctrine comes down from heaven.

So Jesus Christ, we say, is "not of the world." He had no office that could be termed a worldly one and He had no aim which was in the least worldly. He did not seek His own applause, His own fame, His own honor. His very office was not of the world.

And O believer! what is your office? Have you none at all? Why, yes, man! you are a priest unto the Lord your God. Your office is to offer a sacrifice of prayer and praise each day. Ask a Christian what he is. Say to him, "What is your official standing? What are you by office?" Well, if he answers you properly, he will not say, "I am a draper or druggist," or anything of that sort. No, he will say, "I am a priest unto my God. The office unto which I am called is to be the salt of the earth. I am a city set on a hill, a light that cannot be hid. That is my office. My office is not a worldly one."

Whether yours is the office of the minister, or the deacon, or the church member, you are not of this world in your office, even as Christ was not of the world. Your occupation is not a worldly one.

3. Again, *you are not of the world in your character*, for that is the chief point in which Christ was not of the world. And now, brethren, I shall have to turn somewhat from doctrine to practice before I get rightly to this part of the subject, for I must reprove many of the Lord's people, that they do not sufficiently manifest that they are not of the world in character, even as Christ was not of the world.

Oh! how many of you there are, who will assemble around the table at the supper of your Lord, who do not live like your Savior. How many of you there are, who join our church and walk with us, and yet are not worthy of your high calling and profession. Mark you, the churches all around, and let your eyes run with tears, when you remember that of many of their members, it cannot be said, "Ye *are not* of the world," for they *are* of the world.

O, my hearers, I fear many of you are worldly, carnal, and covetous, and yet you join the churches and stand well with God's people by a hypocritical profession. O you whitewashed sepulchres! You would deceive even the very elect! You make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but your inward part is very wickedness. O that a thundering voice might speak this to your ears!—"Those whom Christ loves are not of the world," but you are of the world, therefore you cannot be His, even though you profess so to be, for those who love Him are not such as you.

Look at Jesus' character, how different from every other man's—pure, perfect, spotless, even such should be the life of the believer. I plead not for the possibility of sinless conduct in Christians, but I

must hold that grace makes men to differ and that God's people will be very different from other kinds of people.

A servant of God will be a God's-man everywhere. As a chemist, he could not indulge in any tricks that such men might play with their drugs. As a grocer—if indeed it be not a phantom that such things are done—he could not mix sloe leaves with tea or red lead in the pepper. If he practiced any other kind of business, he could not for a moment condescend to the little petty shifts called, “methods of business.” To him it is nothing what is called “business,” it is what is called God's law, he feels that he is not of the world, consequently, he goes against its fashions and its maxims.

A singular story is told of a certain Quaker. One day he was bathing in the Thames and a waterman called out to him, “Ha! There goes the Quaker.” “How do you know I'm a Quaker?” “Because you swim against the stream. It is the way the Quakers always do.” That is the way Christians always ought to do—to swim against the stream.

The Lord's people should not go along with the rest in their worldliness. Their characters should be visibly different. You should be such men and women that your fellows can recognize you without any difficulty and say, “Such a man is a Christian.” Ah! beloved, it would puzzle the angel Gabriel himself to tell whether some of you are Christians or not, if he were sent down to the world to pick out the righteous from the wicked. None but God could do it, for in these days of worldly religion, they are so much alike.

It was an ill day for the world when the sons of God and the daughters of men were mingled together. And it is an ill day now when Christians and worldlings are so mixed that you cannot tell the difference between them. God save us from a day of fire that may devour us in consequence! But O beloved! the Christian will be always different from the world. This is a great doctrine and it will be found as true in ages to come as in the centuries which are past.

Looking back into history, we read this lesson, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” We see them driven to the catacombs of Rome. We see them hunted about like partridges. And wherever in history you find God's servants, you can recognize them by their distinct, unvarying character—they were not of the world, but were a people scarred and peeled, a people entirely distinct from the nations.

And if in this age, there are no different people, if there are none to be found who differ from other people, there are no Christians, for Christians will be always different from the world. They are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world. This is the doctrine.

II. Now for treating this text EXPERIENTIALLY.

Do we, dearly beloved, feel this truth? Has it ever been laid to our souls so that we can feel it is ours? “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” Have we ever felt that we are not of the world? Perhaps there is a believer sitting in a pew tonight who says, “Well, sir, I can't say that I feel as if I was not of the world, for I have just come from my shop and worldliness is still hanging about me.”

Another says, “I have been in trouble and my mind is very much harassed—I can't feel that I am different from the world. I am afraid that I am of the world.” But beloved, we must not judge ourselves rashly, because just at this moment we discern not the spot of God's children.

Let me tell you, there are always certain testing moments when you can tell of what kind of stuff a man is made. Two men are walking. Part of the way their road lies side by side. How do you tell which man is going to the right and which to the left? Why, when they come to the turning point. Now, tonight is not a turning point, for you are sitting with worldly people here, but at other times, we may distinguish.

Let me tell you one or two turning points, when every Christian will feel that he is not of the world. One is, when he gets into very *deep trouble*. I do believe and protest, that we never feel so unearthly as when we get plunged down into trouble. Ah! when some creature comfort has been swept away, when some precious blessing has withered in our sight, like the fair lily, snapped at the stalk. When some

mercy has been withered, like Jonah's gourd in the night—then it is that the Christian feels, “I am not of the world.”

His cloak is torn from him and the cold wind whistles almost through him. And then he says, “I am a stranger in the world, as all my fathers were. Lord, You have been my dwelling-place in all generations.” You have had at times deep sorrows. Thank God for them! They are testing moments.

When the furnace is hot, it is then that the gold is tried best. Have you felt at such a time that you were not of the world? Or have you rather sat down and said, “Oh! I do not deserve this trouble”? Did you break under it? Did you bow down before it and let it crush you while you cursed your Maker? Or did your spirit, even under its load, still lift itself unto Him, like a man all dislocated on the battlefield, whose limbs are cut away, but who still lifts himself up as best he can and looks over the field to see if there be a friend approaching?

Did you do so? Or did you lie down in desperation and despair? If you did that, methinks you are no Christian. But if there was a rising up, it was a testing moment, and it proved that you were “not of the world,” because you could master affliction, because you could tread it under foot and say,

*“When all created streams are dry,
His goodness is the same;
With this I well am satisfied,
And glory in His name.”*

But another testing moment is *prosperity*. Oh! there have been some of God's people who have been more tried by prosperity than by adversity. Of the two trials, the trial of adversity is less severe to the spiritual man than that of prosperity. “As the fining pot for silver, so is a man to his praise.” It is a terrible thing to be prosperous. You had need to pray to God, not only to help you in your troubles, but to help you in your blessings.

Mr. Whitefield once had a petition to put up for a young man who had—stop, you will think it was for a young man who had lost his father or his property. No! “The prayers of the congregation are desired for a young man who has become heir to an immense fortune and who feels he has need of much grace to keep him humble in the midst of riches.”

That is the kind of prayer that ought to be put up, for prosperity is a hard thing to bear. Now, perhaps you have become almost intoxicated with worldly delights, even as a Christian. Everything goes well with you. You have loved and you are loved. Your affairs are prosperous. Your heart rejoices, your eyes sparkle. You tread the earth with a happy soul and a joyous countenance. You are a happy man, for you have found that even in worldly things, “godliness with contentment is great gain.”

Did you ever feel,

*“These can never satisfy;
Give me Christ, or else I die”?*

Did you feel that these comforts were nothing but the leaves of the tree and not the fruit, and that you could not live upon mere leaves? Did you feel they were after all nothing but husks? Or did you not sit down and say, “Now, soul, take thine ease; thou hast goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry”? If you did imitate the rich fool, then you were of the world. But if your spirit went up above your prosperity so that you still lived near to God, then you proved that you were a child of God, for you were not of the world. These are testing points, both prosperity and adversity.

Again, you may test yourselves in this way *in solitude and in company*. In solitude you may tell whether you are not of the world. I sit down, throw the window up, look out on the stars, and think of them as the eyes of God looking down upon me! And oh! does it not seem glorious at times to consider the heavens when we can say, “Ah! beyond those stars is my house not made with hands. Those stars are

milestones on the road to glory, and I shall soon tread the glittering way, or be carried by seraphs far beyond them, and be there!" Have you felt in solitude that you are not of the world?

And so again in company? Ah! beloved, believe me, company is one of the best tests for a Christian. You are invited to an evening party. Sundry amusements are provided which are not considered exactly sinful, but which certainly cannot come under the name of pious amusements. You sit there with the rest. There is a deal of idle chat going on, you would be thought puritanical to protest against it.

Have you not come away—and notwithstanding all has been very pleasant and friends have been very agreeable—have you not been inclined to say, "Ah! that does not do for me. I would rather be in a prayer meeting. I would rather be in an old broken down cow-lodge with six old women, so long as I could be with the people of God, than in fine rooms with all the dainties and delicacies that could be provided without the company of Jesus. By God's grace I will seek to shun all these places as much as possible."

That is a good test. You will prove in this way that you are not of the world. And you may do so in a great many other ways, which I have no time to mention. Have you felt this experientially, so that you can say, "I know that I am not of the world, I feel it. I experience it." Don't talk of doctrine. Give me doctrine ground into experience is. Doctrine is good, but experience is better. Experiential doctrine is the true doctrine which comforts and which edifies.

IV. And now, lastly, we must briefly apply this in PRACTICE.

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." And first, allow me, man or woman, to apply this to you. *You who are of the world*, whose maxims, whose habits, whose behavior, whose feelings, whose everything is worldly and carnal, listen you to this. Perhaps you make some profession of religion. Hear me, then.

Your boasting of religion is empty as a phantom and shall pass away when the sun rises, as the ghosts sleep in their grave at the crowing of the cock. You have some pleasure in that professioned religion of yours wherewith you are arrayed, and which you carry about you as a cloak, and use as a stalking horse to your business, and a net to catch the honor in the world, and yet you are worldly, like other men.

Then I tell you if there be no distinction between yourself and the worldly, the doom of the worldly shall be your doom. If you were marked and watched, your next door tradesman would act as you do and you act as he does. There is no distinction between you and the world. Hear me, then.

It is God's solemn truth. You are none of His. If you are like the rest of the world, you are of the world. You are a goat and with goats you shall be cursed. For the sheep can always be distinguished from the goats by their appearance. O you worldly men of the world! You carnal professors, you who crowd our churches and fill our places of worship, this is God's truth!

Let me say it solemnly. If I should say it as I ought, it would be weeping tears of blood. You are, with all your profession, "in the gall of bitterness." With all your boastings, you are "in bonds of iniquity." For you act as others, and you shall come where others come, and it shall be done with you as with more notorious heirs of hell.

There is an old story which was once told of a Dissenting minister. The old custom was that a minister might stop at an inn and not pay anything for his bed or his board. And when he went to preach, from place to place, he was charged nothing for the conveyance in which he rode. But on one occasion, a certain minister stopped at an inn and went to bed. The landlord listened and heard no prayer, so when the preacher came down in the morning, he was presented his bill. "Oh! I am not going to pay that, for I am a minister." "Ah!" said the landlord, "you went to bed last night like a sinner and you shall pay this morning like a sinner. I will not let you go."

Now, it strikes me that this will be the case with some of you when you come to God's bar. Though you pretended to be a Christian, you acted like a sinner and you shall fare like a sinner, too. Your actions were unrighteous. They were far from God. And you shall have a portion with those whose character

was the same as yours. "Be not deceived." It is easy to be so. "God is not mocked," though we often are, both minister and people. "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

And now we want to apply this to many *true children of God* who are here, by way of caution. I say, my brother Christian, you are not of the world. I am not going to speak hardly to you, because you are my brother, and in speaking to you I speak to myself also, for I am as guilty as you are.

Brother, have we not often been too much like the world? Do we not sometimes in our conversation talk too much like the world? Come, let me ask myself, are there not too many idle words that I say? Ay, that there are. And do I not sometimes give occasion to the enemy to blaspheme, because I am not so different from the world as I ought to be?

Come, brother, let us confess our sins together. Have we not been too worldly? Ah! we have. Oh! let this solemn thought cross our minds—suppose that after all we should not be His! for it is written, "Ye are not of the world." O God! if we are not right, make us so. Where we are a little right, make us still more right, and where we are wrong, amend us!

Allow me to tell a story to you. I told it when I was preaching last Tuesday morning, but it is worth telling again. There is a great evil in many of us being too light and frothy in our conversation. A very strange thing once happened. A minister had been preaching in a country village, very earnestly and fervently.

In the midst of his congregation there was a young man who was deeply impressed with a sense of sin under the sermon. He therefore sought the minister as he went out, in hopes of walking home with him. They walked till they came to a friend's house. On the road, the minister had talked about anything except the subject on which he had preached, though he preached very earnestly and even with tears in his eye. The young man thought within himself, "Oh! I wish I could unburden my heart and speak to him, but cannot. He does not say anything now about what he spoke of in the pulpit."

When they were at supper that evening, the conversation was very far from what it should be, and the minister indulged in all kinds of jokes and light sayings. The young man had gone into the house with eyes filled with tears, feeling like a sinner should feel. But as soon as he got outside after the conversation, he stamped his foot and said, "It is a lie from beginning to end. That man has preached like an angel and now he has talked like a devil."

Some years after, the young man was taken ill and sent for this same minister. The minister did not know him. "Do you remember preaching at such and such a village?" asked the young man. "I do." "Your text was very deeply laid to my heart." "Thank God for that," said the minister. "Do not be so quick about thanking God," said the young man. "Do you know what you talked of that evening afterwards, when I went to supper with you? *Sir I shall be damned!* And I will charge *you* before God's throne with being the author of my damnation. On that night I did feel my sin, but you were the means of scattering all my impressions."

That is a solemn thought, brother, and teaches us how we should curb our tongues, especially those who are so light-hearted, after solemn services and earnest preaching, that we should not betray levity. Oh! let us take heed that we are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world.

And Christian, lastly, by way of practice, let me comfort you with this. You are not of the world for your home is in heaven. Be content to be here a little, for you are not of the world and you shall go up to your own bright inheritance by and by. A man in traveling goes into an inn. It is rather uncomfortable, "Well," says he, "I shall not have to stay here many nights. I have only to sleep here tonight. I shall be at home in the morning, so I don't care much about one night's lodging being a little uncomfortable."

So, Christian, this world is never a very comfortable one, but recollect, you are not of the world. This world is like an inn. You are only lodging here a little while. Put up with a little inconvenience, because you are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world. And by and by, up yonder, you shall be gathered into your Father's house, and there you will find that there is a new heaven and a new earth provided for those who are "not of the world."

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.