

Vision and the Christian Life

(Part 5)

The Christian Perception of the World

From the beginning of Christianity there have been some who left the so-called world, escaping to the desert or hidden places to avoid the contamination and the temptation of the world. There are very few Christians who think that way today.

This attitude of world rejection seems to ignore the words that God expressed at the world's creation.

Genesis 1:31 [NIV] *“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.”*

God judged all He had created to be good.

John 17:15-18 [NIV] *“My prayer is **not that you take them out of the world** but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”*

Jesus Christ intended His disciples to remain in the world.

Romans 12:2 [NIV] *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed **by the renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Part of the world but with a renewed mind and perception of how to conduct our lives.

The true Christian must ask the question.

If I truly “*put on the mind of Christ*” how must I perceive the world?

If I could see through the eyes of Christ, what would the world look like?

When I mention “*the world*” I am using the term here to embrace all created reality, all physical things **except people**.

This usage will include all material things, but also would include immaterial abstract things such as talents and abilities, personal qualities and attainments.

This usage will include also such things as money, houses, books, good looks, athletic ability, a charming smile, curly hair, straight white teeth, good health, academic degrees, artistic talent, a sense of humour, reputation, power or influence, etc.

All these things are part of the world I'm talking about.

How am I as a Christian believer to regard these things?

Luke 12:15-21 [NIV] *“Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”*

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ ‘This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.’”

This parable of Jesus describes the tyranny of possessions.

We are to look on all we are blessed with in this world through the eyes of a steward, they are only ours for a short period of time.

God desires us to embrace all the blessings He gives to us, but we must **not** allow them to possess or shackle us.

The things in this world must never dominate or manipulate us.

The things of this world must never be allowed to pre-empt our freedom to make our own decisions.

There is an old adage that states, *“we are all born with clenched fists, but we must all die with open hands.”*

I reach out to take into my hands the fullness of life and creation. But nothing is ever so fastened to my grasp that I cannot give it up.

The perspective of life that the Christian Bible gives is very clear.

We are to love people and use things, never the other way round of loving things and using people to possess those things.

When we begin to love things we start perhaps imperceptibly at first, to use people.

1 Timothy 6:10 [NIV] *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”*

Notice it does **not** say that money is the root of all evil but rather the love of money is the root of all evil.

Having money isn't evil, but giving your heart away to money is a tragedy.

A love of money will cause you to *“burn the candle at both ends”* in order to acquire more and more, ending up with ulcers and heart attacks.

Luke 18:18-24 [NIV] *“A certain ruler asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No-one is good — except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honour your father and mother.’” “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. **Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.**” When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”*

This poor fellow couldn't accept the invitation to follow Jesus because of his attachment to his possessions.

John 13:34-35 [NIV] *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

If we fail to free ourselves from these attachments and addictions it will mean a gradual death of love for one another, and this love is what Christianity is all about.

Open hands are needed for us to become disciples of Jesus Christ.

The same kind of possessive addiction is possible, of course, with non-material things, prestige, power, success, honour, reputation, public admiration, the pleasure of the senses, triumphs over and conquests of other people.

A study of child celebrities showed how in later years most became seriously embittered adults.

The conclusions drawn by the survey suggested that the reason for this bitterness was that these people had once been the centre of attention.

They once stood in centre stage and had been given all that goes with such a life.

Now, as the shadows of their lives began to lengthen, they were deprived of these things.

The glitter of their early careers had disappeared, and they felt cheated.

We all should ask the really pertinent questions.

Am I possessed and dominated by things?

Matthew 6:19-21 [NIV] *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

Where have I invested my heart?

Have I so given my heart to a personal gift or to a piece of property that my capacity to love other people, to be concerned for their needs, is proportionally diminished?

All of us who wish to be part of the Kingdom of God, by being disciples of Jesus Christ, must ask ourselves these questions and be honest with our answers.

Do we have in our lives a list of “*untouchables*” as far as God and the serving of other human beings in need are concerned?

Luke 22:39-44 [NIV] *“Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, **“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”** An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”*

If God expected me to surrender one of my “*untouchables*” would I experience my own agony in the garden?

God was asking Jesus the Son of Man to give up everything in an agonising way on the cross at the young age of 33 years.

Such Christ-like open-handedness can only be managed “*with His grace*”, that is the powerful presence and anointing of the Holy Spirit in our lives as it was with Jesus Christ the Son of Man.

God will during our lives test our “*open handedness*” at times.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

The fullness of life and personal peace of mind can only be experienced in the full surrender of my will and desires to the will and desires of God.

This is the teaching of God's Word, the Handbook for Life, the Christian Bible.

This is the price and the reward of open hands, of those who are desiring to be filled with the presence of God, not things.

So while passing through and enjoying this delightful and beautiful world that God has created, we must remain ready at any time to give up the blessings we have received from God.

We give glory to God by using all the gifts He has given us, and using them to fullest capacity in showing love to others.

The Christian vision of this world does **not** easily tolerate "*the comfort zones*" we long to hold on to.

The Christian perspective of this world challenges us to openness, to love people **not** things.

Matthew 22:1-4 [NIV] *"Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'"*

Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to an invitation to a marriage banquet prepared for his son.

Matthew 22:5 [NIV] *"But they paid no attention and went off, one to his field, another to his business."*

Most interested in attaining wealth and possessions than being the bride of his son [Jesus Christ] as we are shown in the parallel scriptures.

Revelation 19:7-9 [NIV] *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."*

The same invitation to a wedding supper.

Matthew 22:11 [NIV] *"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes."*

What were the wedding clothes this man was lacking?

Revelation 19:8 [NIV] *"Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)"*

The open-handed acts of those who will be the bride of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 25:31-32 [NIV] *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."*

Referring to God's final judgement of our lives.

Matthew 25:33-40 [NIV] *"He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance,*

the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

Here are described a group of people who loves people **not** their own possessions.

Their reward was entry into the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 25:41-46 [NIV] *“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”*

This group of people were clenched fists by nature, **not** willing to open their hands to others in need.

Their reward was eternal death.

Romans 12:2 [NIV] *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

We live in a world that is in love with possessions, for us to enter into God’s world, the Kingdom of God, we have to make a dramatic change in our perspective of this world, the life we now live.

This change starts in our mind, which is a difficult and humbling change to make.

Romans 12:3-8 [NIV] *“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: **Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought**, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”*

We are all part of one body, each part serving the other parts.

Jesus Christ is to marry one bride, we enter the Kingdom of God as part of that one body that is united in love for one another.

Romans 12:9-13 [NIV] *“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. **Share with God’s people who are in need. Practise hospitality.”***

A group of open-handed people.

Romans 12:14-20 [NIV] *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. **Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.** Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”*

A group of people who have learnt to be open-handed and loving even to their enemies.

The “*burning coals*” refer to the melting of the hardest resistance to the love that we show to them.

Romans 12:21 [NIV] *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

How do we overcome evil and the evil one?

Revelation 12:9-11 [NIV] *“The great dragon was hurled down, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. **They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.**”*

Evil is overcome by the loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God, and our own loving open-handed sacrifice of our lives, as an example for others to follow.

This world needs open-handed Christians to overcome the grip that evil has on it at this time.