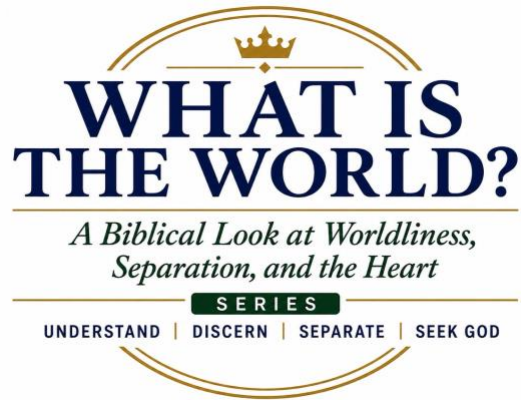




Lesson 1: What Does the Bible Mean by “The World”?

1. What Does the Bible Mean by “The World”?	5. The Fear of Man and the Danger of Tradition
2. Plain on the Outside, Worldly on the Inside	6. Modesty, Technology, and Christian Liberty
3. The Sins We Do Not Always Call Worldly	7. Born Amish Is Not the Same as Born Again
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Lesson Overview

For generations, Amish people have been taught to be separate from the world. That desire comes from an important biblical truth. Romans 12:2 tells believers not to be conformed to this world. But before we can obey that command correctly, we need to understand what God means when He speaks about “the world.”

Among the Amish, worldliness is often connected with things such as cars, electricity, store-bought clothing, bright colors, jewelry, televisions, computers, and other modern conveniences. But when we study the Bible carefully, we find that Scripture puts much more attention on the heart, our desires, our attitudes, our choices, and the sins we allow into our lives. The purpose of this lesson is not to make fun of Amish ways, attack simple living, or encourage anyone to become more like modern culture. Simple living can be good. Modesty can be good. Avoiding harmful influences can be wise. The question is this: **Are we allowing the Word of God to define holiness and worldliness, or are we allowing tradition to define them for us?**

Main Scripture

1 John 2:15-17

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

Main Truth

True biblical separation is not simply separating ourselves from certain objects or customs. It is turning away from sin, turning toward God, and allowing Jesus Christ to change us from the inside out.

Memory Verse

Romans 12:2

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Section 1: What Does God Mean by “The World”?

Many Amish people have been taught from childhood that Christians should not be conformed to the world. That teaching often comes from Romans 12:2. It is an important command from God, and Christians should not follow the sinful ways of the world. But before we can obey that command, we must ask an important question:

What does the Bible mean by “the world”?

For many Amish people, the word *worldly* brings certain things to mind. A car may be considered worldly. Electric lights may be considered worldly. Store-bought clothing, bright colors, jewelry, televisions, computers, and many other modern things may also be called worldly. But is that how God defines worldliness?

The Bible Gives Us the Definition

1 John 2:15-16

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

Notice what God lists. He speaks about **the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life**. He does not say that the world is an automobile, electricity, store-bought clothing, buttons, bright colors, or a telephone.

The world God warns us about is much more serious. It is a way of thinking and living that is against God. It includes sinful desires, pride, greed, lust, selfishness, dishonesty, hatred, jealousy, drunkenness, adultery, fornication, gossip, bitterness, and rebellion against God. These things come from the heart.

A Buggy Does Not Change the Heart

Eli drives a horse and buggy. He has never owned a car. His home does not have electricity from the power line, and he wears plain clothes made according to the rules of his church. Everyone who sees Eli would probably say, “There goes a plain man.”

But Eli is dishonest in his business. When he sells a horse, he knows the horse has a serious problem, but he does not tell the buyer. When he reports his income, he hides some of the money he made. At home, Eli becomes angry with his wife and children. He holds grudges against his neighbors and tells stories about other people that make them look bad. Eli is separated from many things his community calls worldly, but is Eli separated from worldliness?

Colossians 3:9

“Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;”

Ephesians 4:31

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:”

Eli may never sit behind the steering wheel of a car, but that does not make his heart holy. A horse and buggy cannot remove dishonesty. Plain clothing cannot remove bitterness, and living without electricity cannot remove anger. Only Jesus Christ can change the heart.

This does not mean that every modern thing is wise or helpful. There are many things in modern society that can lead people toward temptation and sin, and Christians should use wisdom. But we must also be careful not to call something sin when God has not called it sin while ignoring things God clearly does call sin.

Discussion Questions

1. When you were growing up, what things were commonly called “worldly,” and where did those ideas come from?
2. According to 1 John 2:15-16, what are the three things God especially points to when describing the world?
3. Why can it be easier to notice a car, clothing style, or electricity than to notice pride, bitterness, dishonesty, or lust in our own hearts?
4. Are there attitudes or sins in your own life that may need more attention than the outward things you have been taught to avoid?

Section 2: Being Different Is Not the Same as Being Holy

An Amish family may look very different from the people around them. Samuel's family travels by horse and buggy while their neighbors travel by car. Samuel's family uses lanterns while their neighbors use electric lights. Samuel's family wears homemade clothing while their neighbors buy their clothing at a store. There is certainly a difference between the two families, but here is the important question: **Does being different automatically mean being holy?**

Holiness is more than being different from the people around us. Holiness means being separated unto God. A person can be different because of tradition, culture, family pressure, or church rules without having a heart that belongs to Jesus Christ.

Looking Right on the Outside

Jesus spoke strongly about people who looked religious on the outside but had serious problems on the inside.

Matthew 23:27-28

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

Their problem was not that outward cleanliness was wrong. Their problem was that the outside looked righteous while the inside remained sinful. The same danger exists today.

If everyone in your community suddenly began driving black cars instead of black buggies, would their hearts become more sinful? If everyone gave up cars tomorrow and began driving buggies, would their hearts suddenly become more holy? The answer helps us see the difference between outward customs and inward holiness.

A Plain Dress Cannot Make a Pure Heart

Mary wears a long plain dress and covering. She does not wear jewelry and would never wear bright, fashionable clothing. But Mary is jealous of another woman in the church. She talks about her behind her back and enjoys hearing when something goes wrong in the other woman's family.

Mary also compares her home, children, garden, and possessions with others. On the outside, Mary looks very plain, but what does God see?

James 3:16

“For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.”

Mary's plain dress is not the problem. Modesty is good and biblical. But plain clothing cannot remove jealousy from Mary's heart. A person can wear the simplest clothing in the community and still have a heart filled with envy and pride.

Worldliness Begins Within

Jesus tells us where sinful behavior begins.

Mark 7:21-23

“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”

Notice the words **“from within.”** Jesus points directly to the heart. He mentions evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, murder, theft, covetousness, deceit, pride, and other sins. These are the things that defile a person.

The Lantern Illustration

Jacob is reading his Bible at home after dark by the light of a kerosene lantern. Daniel is reading his Bible by an electric lamp. Which man is more spiritual? We cannot answer that question by looking at the kind of light they are using.

Now suppose Jacob closes his Bible and begins spreading an untrue story about his neighbor. Daniel closes his Bible and goes to his neighbor to ask forgiveness for something he said earlier that day. Which man's actions are more pleasing to God? The kerosene lantern did not make Jacob holy, and the electric lamp did not make Daniel worldly. The important issue was what was happening in their hearts and how they responded to God.

It is much easier to see an automobile than pride. It is much easier to see electric wires than lust. It is much easier to see colorful clothing than bitterness, and it is much easier to see jewelry than dishonesty. But God sees what people cannot see.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between being outwardly different from society and being truly holy before God?
2. Why do you think people sometimes put more attention on outward appearance than on sins of the heart?
3. In the story of Mary, which problem does Scripture clearly condemn, her plain clothing or her jealousy and gossip, and what does this teach us?
4. If nobody could see your clothing, your home, your vehicle, or your church background, what attitudes and actions in your life would still show that you belong to Jesus Christ?

Section 3: True Separation Begins With a Changed Heart

Romans 12:2 is often used when speaking about separation from the world. But sometimes we stop after the first part of the verse.

Romans 12:2

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

God does not simply tell us what we should not be. He tells us what should happen instead: **“Be ye transformed.”** Christianity is not simply about removing things from our lives. It is about God changing us from the inside out.

He changes the way we think, what we love, our desires, and our attitudes. He changes how we treat our husband or wife, how we handle money, how we speak about our neighbor, and what we do when nobody else is watching. Jesus Christ changes the heart and then changes the life.

What If Levi Followed Every Rule?

Levi belongs to a very strict Amish church. He follows every church rule. His buggy is exactly the right style. His clothing follows the approved pattern. His hat is the proper size. He uses the approved kind of lighting, his house has no electricity, and he never owns anything forbidden by the Ordnung.

But Levi has never truly trusted Jesus Christ for salvation. He believes his baptism, church membership, good works, plain lifestyle, and obedience to the church will help him get to heaven. Is Levi safe because he is outwardly separated from the world? No. Outward separation cannot save anyone.

Ephesians 2:8-9

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Salvation does not come through driving the right vehicle, wearing the right clothing, belonging to the right church, or keeping enough rules. Salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. When Christ saves us, He also begins changing our hearts and lives.

There Really Is a World We Must Reject

We should not go too far in the other direction. The Bible clearly teaches separation from the world. There is real worldliness. There is real sin, and there are things Christians should refuse and flee from.

Ephesians 5:11

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”

The world celebrates sexual immorality, but Christians should seek purity. The world excuses drunkenness, but Christians should live soberly. The world celebrates pride, but Christians should walk humbly. The world may say lying is acceptable when it helps us get what we want, but God's people should tell the truth. The world promotes lust, but God's people should guard their hearts. The world says, “Live for yourself,” but Jesus calls us to live for Him.

Colossians 3:5-9

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;”

This is real separation from the world. It deals with sin that God clearly identifies and calls us to put away.

The Real Test of Worldliness

When we want to know whether something is worldly, our first question should not be, **“What does our community say?”** Our first question should be, **“What does the Word of God say?”**

Traditions can change from one Amish group to another. One group may allow something another group forbids. One district may permit certain equipment while another district does not. One church may allow a technology for business but forbid it in the home. If our definition of worldliness changes every time we cross into another church district, we should ask whether that definition is coming from Scripture or from tradition. God's Word does not change when we cross a county line. Truth does not change from one Ordnung to another.

There is nothing wrong with living simply, driving a horse and buggy, wearing homemade clothing, choosing plain colors, or deciding to live without electricity or modern technology. The problem begins when we make those choices the definition of holiness.

A man can drive a buggy and still lie. A woman can wear a plain dress and still gossip. A young man can live without electricity and still struggle with lust. A church member can follow the Ordnung carefully and still be filled with pride. A person can separate himself from modern society and still remain separated from God. That is why Jesus goes after the heart.

The greatest question is not, **“How plain do I look?”** The greatest question is, **“Does my heart belong to Jesus Christ?”** True biblical separation is more than separating ourselves from certain objects. It is turning away from sin and turning toward God. It is refusing the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. It is allowing Jesus Christ to change us from the inside out. **The world we must fear most is not the world parked in the driveway. It is the world that wants to live in our hearts.**

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between following church rules and being transformed by Jesus Christ?
2. Are there things you have called worldly even though you would have difficulty showing from Scripture that they are sinful?
3. If your church or community approved of something God's Word condemned, which should have the final authority in your life, and what if your church condemned something Scripture did not condemn?
4. What is one area of your heart, attitude, speech, relationships, or behavior where you believe God wants to bring greater change?