

John 17:14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

Before we start anything, I need us to be aware of the fact that here in the Gospel of John, Jesus talks about the opposition of **THE WORLD**, linking it with the evil one. John mentions the **WORLD TEN TIMES** in these few verses. Put that in your pocket for later. Something very serious is happening here.

This series about our beliefs will continue on for a few more weeks before we make our way into Lent. Before I take us into another part today, let's do a quick little review of where we have been.

First, I tried to explain that people, even within churches, seem to have a rough time these days with understanding or articulating what they believe about God, life, even themselves. And, I tried to make the case that what we believe is crucially important, because our lives will leave behind a trail of actions and behaviors which will have come directly from what we believe.

Second, I suggested that our beliefs need to be discussed with others, and even tested. How do we know what we believe? Can we back up what we believe? We mentioned the 4-fold Wesleyan way of trying to understand our beliefs, of Scripture, Church Tradition, Experience, and Reason.

Last Sunday, I tried to talk about what we actually are, as babies born into this world. I suggested that what we believe about ourselves also matters greatly, and that the Bible tells us that we are actually created in the Image of God, that it is our destiny to imitate God’s ways and bring God’s goodness into this broken world. I suggested that we believe that we are in fact junior partners in Creation with God. Life is not just a funny, funny riddle, as John Denver once sang, but something with the greatest meaning and purpose.

Today will probably be the hardest day for us of this series, because the news is not good, but the news is necessary, or else there can be no other hope. Today’s beliefs must be factored into this whole deal before we can find our way into the light. So here is our first question for this day, and it’s a big one: ***What is human nature? Is it good, bad, or neutral?*** I think that many people today would say that our nature is neutral, that we are a blank slate waiting to be filled in. Some very optimistic idealistic folks might claim that human nature is actually very good. After all, if we are created in the Image of God, shouldn’t we automatically be headed in the right direction? But then there are two other groups of folks who would vote that human nature is broken and terribly flawed. These groups are 1) people who have been wronged in life and have seen the worst of human evil. The other group, 2) orthodox Christians.

That might seem surprising, but if we check the records on this, the Church of Jesus Christ has always taught that human sin and brokenness are the norm for humanity. I will try to

explain this a bit more, but for now, let’s fill in another blank on a score sheet: **7. We live in a Condition of Brokenness and Sin.**

I said it a few minutes ago, and I will say it again: Today will probably be the hardest day for us of this series, because the news is hard to hear, but the news is necessary, or else there can be no other hope. The news here is necessary. Folks, if we are actually fine just the way we are, then we need to close this church and we all need to sleep in or play golf or wash the car or something else. If we are fine just the way we are, if our nature is fine automatically, then we don’t need a Savior, we don’t need Grace, we don’t need any help from God or anyone else. We would be self-sufficient, and the world around us would be fine as well.

But is it? Is the world fine? If there is no trouble with human nature, then who is tearing up our world? We can’t blame it on aliens! Our wounds are self-inflicted, and they always have been. Our world is filled with the brokenness of human life. It seems to be *our nature* to be insecure, to be greedy, to be insatiable, to be ignorant, to be violent, and to not care about things or persons beyond ourselves. I don’t know about you, but have you noticed the movies that have been coming out in the last 20 years? Most all are about killing, violence, torture, and just plain old evil. And people are flocking to see them. Why? How? I don’t know. It just scares me. It makes me long for the really good old days of movies like “It’s a Wonderful Life,” or even 40 years ago, a crazed movie called the

“Blues Brothers!” They fired 15 million rounds and wrecked 500 cars, and no one was injured! But even back then, society and the world had lots of troubles.

This leads us to another issue today that must be understood as a fundamental principle. **8. The world around us is not neutral.** It is just as lost and broken. For years I have done weddings, probably 300 of them, and always I invite the couple to be active in church. I explain to every couple, that if we do not spend some time getting a second opinion about life from the Church, then we are abandoned to the world, and the world is not a very good influence.

If nothing else happens today I want to make sure that you all understand a principle from the Bible. In the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, there is the Israel of God, and there are the Nations. The two are not the same, and they cannot be the same. One is there to rescue the other. In the New Testament it continues with new words. In the New Testament we have the Church and we have the world. By the way, the “world” is not the earth, the planet, etc. The world is literally ‘ο κοσμος which means the human world order of things. The trees don’t have any problems, or the fields, or the birds. But the human order of things in the world, that is another story!

So when the NT talks about the Church and the World, again, the one is sent to save the other. And because of that, it is not our job to just blend in with the world. We cannot be “worldly,” as our grandparents might have put it. Israel and the Nations, the Church and the World. Just as ancient Israel was

commanded not to blend in with the Nations, who were far from God’s ways, so the Church is commanded not to just blend in with the human world order of things. If we do not understand this, it is pretty likely that everything else we do will go in the ditch!

What must we understand this day? We are broken and cannot save ourselves. Our human order of life is lost, and it cannot save itself. But God has sent a Life Boat, and believe it or not, it is us! We are sent to be in the world, but not of the world. Jesus says this in his great prayer for his disciples because he knows that he will be leaving them. *As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.* All of our human world order is broken. We need to believe and accept this. The healing can only begin with acceptance of the illness. If we don’t know we have a problem, we can never get better. And that is why God has been working to save us for such a long time. And as Jesus would remind us, it is God’s will that none would perish. Let this understanding be within us. This is serious news. But the Good News is far more powerful, which should make us all smile today. We are what we believe. AMEN.