

What in the World Are We to Do?

John 17:9-11 5-28-17

With the last day of school behind us for a while, how many students asked, "Now what?" Did the disciples ask the same question as their teacher left, ascending to heaven? "He left us in the world, but what in the *world* are we to do?"

As today's disciples, we too ask, What are we to do? What must we know to succeed in doing it? A church, like an army, school or any organization, must know at least these three things to be successful: who tells us what to do, what are we supposed to do, and who in the world will oppose what we are to do.

First, who tells the Church what to do? Jesus says that God had given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom God had given him. Paul says in Corinthians that we are not our own. Jesus redeemed us with his blood. Therefore, we do not decide what in the world we are to do. Jesus does.

Secondly, what we are to do is clear. With the disciples, Jesus sent us to into the world so that all may know that Jesus came from God so they have salvation through him. To do this in the world, we must not become part of it, just as Jesus did not become part of the world He served. James put it this way: *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. 1:27*

When Jesus says that he is not praying for the world, He doesn't mean he doesn't love the world. He died for it after all. Later he prays not only for His disciples, but also for those who will believe through their word. What we are to do in the world is proclaim His Word. Therefore, when Jesus prays for the Church, He is praying for the world, to whom He has sent the Church.

Jesus shows His authority not only by telling us what to do in the world, by also by protecting from the world through His prayers. The need for His prayer we see later in this chapter, and in Peter's epistle. There we learn more about the third thing we need to know: Who in the world stands in opposition.

Those opposing Christ and His Church do so because of pride. We all like to coddle our sins and boast of our meager righteousness. True Christians realize this is sin, repent of their unrighteousness, and seek God's ongoing help to keep amending their lives.

Not so with the world in opposition to God. That is why it crucified Jesus and why it still daily persecutes and kills Christians. It rejects repentance. Jesus prayed for his disciples in vs 14-15, *I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.*

Opposition has always been around, as Peter wrote, *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

"Fiery trial" is not just violence, insults or loss of rights. Satan also destroys with his deceptions that corrupt beliefs and morality. I cannot emphasize enough the power of daily repentance in opposing him. Only by remaining honest before God can we resist self-deception.

There is no honor in suffering because of our own neglect of God's commands, or lack of discerning truth from error, or lazy apathy in growing in our faith.

Thus, Peter tells us to humble ourselves before God, resist the devil, so that we don't suffer for doing evil. He concludes with this encouragement: *after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the dominion forever and ever.*

And that's where we started. He has dominion because He has redeemed the whole world with his suffering, death and resurrection. Therefore, He has authority to tell us what in the world we are to do. What we are to do is to tell the world what He did to save all who will repent. We are to change the world, but not let the world change us.

Christ met opposition. So will we, even to the point of death. Yet Jesus told His disciples right before this prayer, *In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.* So, under his protective authority, we can do what in the world He sent us to do. Amen.