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Point 5: A Place of Mixture, Tension and Pressure

THE MIXTURE IN THE WORLD BEFORE POINT 4—JEW AND GENTILE

We have seen how the world changed after the initial rebellion of the man and woman (Point 2), and how God spoke into that rebellious world, calling people to trust Him for their life by relying on what He said.

From the very first, some have answered this call and some have not. Consequently, throughout history we see a mixture in mankind—a mixture arising from God's choices and Man's responses.

We have seen this fundamental theme as far back as Abraham. When God chose the Hebrew patriarch and called him to obey Him, God's choice (what the Bible calls His 'election') actually *created* a people. The Hebrews did not exist at the time of Abraham's call; they came into being by the Word of God.

From then on we are faced with a continual contrast between the people 'of God' and all other people. The former have the covenants, the promises, the Law, circumcision, the prophets, and so on; the latter are strangers to the covenants,

have no share in Israel, and are 'without hope and without God in the world' (Eph 2:11–13). Thus the Bible describes the Gentiles.

This is the first great separation within mankind. It is an historical-racial separation that can be observed in the world because God spoke and acted in history to create it.

In the last chapter, we saw how it is possible, through the death of Jesus, for the wall between Jew and Gentile to be broken down. This happens when both are 'in Christ'. In practice, this is experienced only in the church of the Messiah (Mt 16:18), as rebels turn to God. A man must accept the salvation which is 'from the Jews', and acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth is both the Messiah who has rescued him and the Lord who governs him.

Moreover, when a Gentile does believe this, he is understood (contrary to natural practice) to be grafted as a wild olive shoot on to God's carefully cultivated olive trees. This is the miracle of his inclusion. When a man becomes a Christian he may be a Gentile by natural birth. Yet by supernatural birth he is made part of Israel, and is considered to be so by God, who has the final say in all things.

The possibility that a Gentile may acknowledge the Jewish Messiah means the great divide has shifted. It is no longer between Jew and Gentile but between the sons of the kingdom (who may be either Jew or Gentile in natural origin) and the sons of the Evil One ('sons' because they obey Satan by sinning, Jn 8:42–47). This is the way Jesus expressed the mixture (Mt 13:38). The distinction is based on the call of God and a trusting response—as it has always been since Abraham (Rom 4). Jesus indicated this mix would remain until Point 6, the end of the age. Men should not attempt to judge for themselves who is who, or separate the righteous from the evil; that is to be left to God and His holy angels. This is the teaching of Jesus' parables of the wheat and tares (Mt 13:24–30, 36–43) and the dragnet (Mt 13:47–50). Read these parables carefully.

ACTION

1 Be very clear about the seriousness and stupidity of any anti-Semitism in your life. Many Christians of Gentile origin have a tragic record in this respect. You may need to deal with God about your Jewish jokes, your business practices, your hostility. Confess them as sin, be forgiven and then renounce this way of living, which is effectively a commitment of will to be hostile to the promises of God and to the Messiah you are attempting to serve. You are the disciple of a Jewish Man—a Man who is God.

2 Have a high view of God's people, and of the biblical heritage. Remember that the grafted wild olive branch is supported by the root—Romans 11:13–21. Read this text carefully and have compassion on God's people, the Jews.

In Chapter 7 we used the image of a land after a great battle to represent the state of the world following Jesus' victory. Despite the land's liberation, some people are still rebels against the victorious King. But there remains time for them to repent and come to terms with His authority. This is why the gospel is preached today. The church of God is actively engaged in evangelism—preaching repentance and imminent judgement. This is the appropriate message for rebels everywhere.

Yet at the same time as there are rebels, others are now children of the King. They have been adopted into His family and, along with the rest of their brethren, are enjoying a personal relationship with Him.

From Man's point of view, this makes the world a very ambiguous place. God wishes this ambiguity to prevail until He puts an end to His merciful time of amnesty at Point 6. Until then, both the calling of men everywhere to repentance, and the life of love experienced by God's children within His grace, go on simultaneously throughout Point 5.

Although Jesus exhorts His disciples not to judge their fellow creatures, there is a certain spiritually-based hostility

between 'the world' and the children of God. They are fundamentally opposed; they are at war. This comes out very clearly in the Gospel and letters of John (1 Jn 2:15-17; 4:4-6; 5:4-5, 19-20).

A MIXTURE WITHIN GOD'S PEOPLE

Throughout the Old Testament, the line of God's elect develops even within His people. Of Abraham's sons, Ishmael is not the child of promise that Isaac was. The same is true of Isaac's sons, Esau and Jacob. And so it continues.

This is Paul's great theme when he wants to illustrate how the unfaithfulness of God's people does not nullify the faithfulness of God (Rom 3:1-4; 9:6-13). Paul can distinguish the children of the flesh (those physically descended from Abraham) from the children of promise (those recognizable by their faithfulness to the Word of God). This picks up an Old Testament idea that in Israel there is a 'faithful remnant'.

So there is a mixture of faithful and unfaithful in the visible people of God at any one time. This is why Paul is undisturbed by the simultaneous manifestation of the faithless and the faithful within Israel in his day (Rom 11:1-5). It has always been that way.

This ambiguous mixture is preserved in the visible church, as Jesus points out in Matthew 7. Although the basic separation is between the people of God and the world (vv 13-14), not all in the visible people of God are truly His. For example, there are false prophets, who may be recognized by their fruits—notice the test is for what is false (vv 15-20). There are also people who make a right confession with their words but who are disobedient in their lives (v 21). And there are many who plead their works (fruits) but whom Jesus declares He does not know (vv 22-23). The true people of God are found by God—they are the ones He knows.

The presence of mixture, both in the world and in the church, brings important realistic insights for living the Christian life at Point 5.

First, it reminds us that our obedience to God must be given in the midst of a hostile environment characterized by the 'great divide'.

Second, it argues that the most basic care we can give our neighbour, wherever we encounter him, is to tell him the good news that there is still time to repent. He can still come to terms with the victorious Ruler. In fact, because we love him we are urgent about this; Point 6 is the next move on God's timetable and we do not know how much time is left. Not to engage in evangelism is a failure to realistically 'read the times'. It is a modern Pharisaism, implying we have settled down, as the Pharisees did, to living on soft terms with the Rebellion. It is faithless living.

Third, it makes it clear we should not squint at the visible church through rose-coloured spectacles. The mixture within the assembled body requires us to be realistic about perfection among God's children—it cannot be achieved on earth. There are no perfect churches to join; we must stop looking unrealistically at the local congregation. We need to emulate the attitude of the apostle Paul, who maintained a very high view of local churches as the body of Christ, yet found it perfectly consistent with life in the last days to exhort, rebuke and constantly encourage them because of their failings.

THE TENSION OF TWO AGES RUNNING CONCURRENTLY

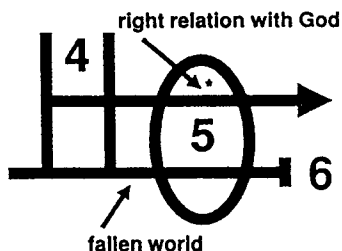
The mixture we have been examining is part of the tension we experience when we are called by Jesus to remain in the world (John 17:15).

The world is fallen and has been visited by God. Yet salvation as we currently experience it does not return us to the garden, nor does it restore the world to its pre-Fall condition. The wonder of our position is that we can have a restored relationship with God in a world that remains, for now, out of right relation with Him.

This maintenance of our relationship is expressed in 1 John 1:5—2:2. John asserts that God is light and in Him is no

darkness at all. Because of this holy consistency in God's Person, we cannot walk in darkness and then say we have fellowship with God (v 6). If we are to walk with Him while we still sin, we will have to be continually confessing our sins to Him and constantly relying on the work of the Son to cleanse us (v 9). This is the way He provides for our relationship to be maintained. And that is why we must have fellowship with both the Father *and* with His Son, Jesus the Messiah (1 Jn 1:3). We cannot live with the Father's Person without coming to Him through the Son (Jn 14:6).

So we live in this relationship with our holy Father in the midst of a world which is still in rebellion against Him. This means the fallen world and the kingdom are running together, though they are distinct from each other. The old and new ages run parallel. (This is expressed in the diagram by the two horizontal lines from Point 4.)



With the coming of the Messiah, the kingdom of God has come on earth—but it has not come as it is in heaven. The will of God is now done on earth—yet it is not done as it is in heaven. The new age has dawned and goes on for ever, whereas the old age is passing away—but the old age has not yet come to its final end. A new life of relationship with God is abroad, but it must be lived in the midst of the old age of rebellion.

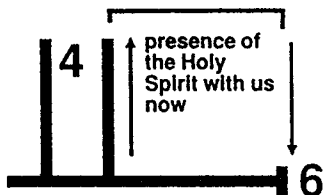
This theme of living in the old age while being at one with

God as His children underlies Jesus' instructions to His disciples about how to live now.

JESUS GOES, WE REMAIN

(Read carefully John 14:15–17 and 16:1–15.)

The call in John's Gospel for us to remain in the world is set against the contrast of Jesus' departure from it. He is returning to the Father. Although He is leaving, however, He makes it clear His disciples will not be left as insecure orphans in an alien, friendless world. In fact, He tells us it is best for Him to go because then the Holy Spirit will be sent from the Father to take up residence in us (16:7). He is a strengthening Person for us, as Jesus was for the first disciples. He is 'another' like Jesus (14:16).



So the risen Christ is ascended; He has gone. Our present experience of Him is through His Spirit, who is sent from the Father. The Spirit's coming and living in us was dependent on Jesus' going. Now, during this time when we are to remain in the world, we are attended by the Spirit. This will be so until the Lord returns in judgement.

'IN' THE WORLD BUT NOT 'OF' IT

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 (John 17:15-18).

God has come and made His home in us. According to Jesus, this means we have been radically changed so that we are no longer 'of' the world. It is not the source of our life; we are 'born of God' now. But though we are no longer 'of' the world, we are to remain 'in' it. What does this mean?

To see the way John expresses the position of tension Christians occupy, we need to investigate his Gospel and letters. We will concentrate on the way he uses the word 'world'. (In his writing, John uses simple words to convey deep and complex ideas. By subtle changes in the way he uses the word 'world', he draws us into his theological thinking.)

What God made. First, John uses the word 'world' to mean the creation, what God has made. It is commonly used this way in English. 'He was in the world, and...the world was made through him' (Jn 1:10; cf 17:5).

The world 'below' (in contrast to 'above') which is invaded by God. Second, 'world' is used to convey an idea of separation between heaven and earth. Jesus comes into the world, which is understood as a place or environment entered by God's Son from above. The world, then, is thought of as being below (Jn 1:9-10; 3:13,19; 6:14).

The idea of heavenly invasion is uppermost in John's mind when he uses the word in this sense. He wants us to think of the world as standing passively, unable to do anything about the great initiative God has taken in sending His Son (Jn 3:17).

A place of darkness. The world is also seen as a place of darkness, desperately in need of light. It is dark both within itself and because it is dominated by dark powers (Jn 1:9; 3:19). The light which invades the darkness of the world is

Jesus Christ. He represents opposition to the dark world (Jn 8:12; 9:5; 11:9; 12:46).

At Point 5, where we live, God's accomplished rule means the darkness is passing away and the true light of Jesus Christ is already shining (1 Jn 2:8).

Hostile and alien to God. The idea that Jesus' coming had the character of an invasion is strengthened by the fact that the world is unable to wrap its mind around Him. It is aware that here is some other One whom it cannot comprehend (Jn 1:5,10).

Further, the world is a hostile place for the Son of God. It is an environment permeated by rebellion, and expresses its alienation and hostility towards Him in an active way (Jn 1:10; 7:7; 15:18). It is not alien because God did not make it; He did. Its alienation is because of its rebellion, and is seen in its harsh reaction to Him.

The world—passing away; ruled by defeated powers. In its hostility to God, the world is understood as being ruled by 'worldly' powers (Jn 12:31; 14:30). The ruler of this world finds that his judgement comes with the work of God's Son (16:11). Indeed, because of its rebellion, the world is under the constant threat of the last judgement (Point 6). It is doomed not to remain for ever; it will pass away (1 Jn 2:17).

From the world, Jesus receives those the Father gives Him (Jn 17:6). This movement out of the world, He says, is the great separation. The origin of those the Father has given Him is no longer 'of the world'; they have received a new, spiritual origin. They have been born anew, born from above (Jn 3:7). They are members of God's family.

In being 'not of the world' they are like Jesus Himself (Jn 17:11). Consequently, the same hostility the world expressed towards Him is brought to bear on them. The world hates them just as it hated Him (Jn 15:18). Jesus is adamant that while in the world His followers will constantly experience

'tribulation' (Jn 16:33, RSV). The Greek word for this tribulation recalls the sound of grapes squashed under the wine-presser's feet: *thlipsis*. We are to think of a powerful, external pressure capable of crushing the insides out of us. But His disciples are to take heart; the world's power is defeated. Jesus the Victor has overcome it (Jn 16:33).

Further, Jesus insists that those the Father has given Him should not ask to be taken out of the world, and He refuses to ask this for them. They are to remain 'in' it while not being 'of' it. However, He acknowledges they will need protection from the Evil One if they remain, so He asks the Father for that on their behalf (Jn 17:15).

This brief study of John introduces us to the basic thinking we are to adopt while in the world. God calls us to remain in this difficult 'tension' position, under the pressure of hostility and tribulation. Although our family and citizenship are heavenly, we are to stay here in 'enemy territory' until the Master returns.

However, we are not at home here. This means we should not expect any 'worldly' peace at all. Jesus certainly promises us His other-worldly peace: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives...' (Jn 14:27). Yet this peace *is always known in the midst of tribulation*. That is the only place His peace is promised; we experience trouble and peace simultaneously.

So our call to remain in the world places us at the meeting of the old age and the new. Our engagement with the world is very real; we do not opt out of it. The world will try to make us conform to its standards, which are born out of hostility to God. But those called to believe in Christ are also called to believe against the rebellious world.

ACTION

- 1 Decide clearly to embrace this idea of living in tension.
- 2 Resist any idea of disengaging from the world; such a view is not Christian. We are in it up to our necks—by the call of

Jesus. This means that avoiding the tension places of the Christian life is not the way to live. We work in and through the tension, not around it.

3 Recognize that engagement in and with the world does not mean living in a worldly way (that is, in rebellion against God).

4 Although the world is hostile to God, do not forget it is still God's world. He made it and redeemed it. Be careful not to confuse the different ways John uses the word 'world'; if you do, you may be found opposing God's beautiful creation instead of enjoying it, unable to find evidence of God in the natural world and its people. You may view people solely as rebels and not as creatures of God with many lovely aspects. You may even do all this because, quite properly, you do not wish to be a worldly (that is, rebellious) person! When we talk about something being 'worldly' in a negative sense, we are referring to the world's hostile intentions to God.

Before the next chapter: Read Matthew 5:1–20 and Romans 5—8.