

## I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood.
- B. Today is part 4 in our Fall series called ILLUSIONS: Escaping the Matrix.
- C. An illusion is something you think is true, but it isn't true. Or it isn't fully true, or exactly true. Truth is reality. An illusion bends away from reality, and fakes you out.
  - 1. The BIG IDEA of this series is that the main philosophies that shape our society and our world are based on illusions.
    - a) The ideas that most people believe, shouldn't be believed.
    - b) The morals that most people take for granted simply aren't true.
    - c) The biggest lie of all says we can have a good world, a just and fair society, without the intervention of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can create Utopia.
    - d) But we can't. *Corrupted creatures can't create uncorrupted cultures.* It's impossible.
- D. That is why the main philosophies that drive much of our culture are illusions. They have swallowed the pill that says humans, by human effort, can have a great time without any reference to the God who made them.
- E. I've gone around in circles a few times on today's message. I started down one path, but I've ended on another. I'm thinking there are some people listening today who really need to think this through.
- F. Today, I would like to talk about the most basic, bottom line illusion of all. We have talked about humanism, determinism (and materialism), and popularity. Today I would like to talk with you about the illusion called Worldliness.

## II. Key Scriptures

- A. *Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4, NKJV).*
- B. *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17, NKJV).*
  - 1. There are a whole lot of Bible verses that say pretty much the same thing. Whatever is meant by *the world*, it's an illusion. And God, who loves you, works overtime to warn you not to get sucked up into its heartbreak.
  - 2. Please think with me about three questions about worldliness:
    - a) What is worldliness?
    - b) What are some features of worldliness?
    - c) How do we as Christians avoid the traps of worldliness?

## III. Three Questions About Worldliness

- A. *What is worldliness?*
  - 1. When I was growing up in church, there was a radically different definition of worldliness. Back then, I was taught that being worldly meant being modern or being up to date.
    - a) Rock music was worldly.
    - b) Women wearing makeup was worldly.
    - c) A woman in my church wore a pantsuit to church, and somebody criticized her for being worldly by not wearing a dress.
    - d) Dancing was worldly. Which is why I still have no rhythm.
    - e) Playing cards was worldly (except Uno). Going to movies. Beer and wine were worldly. Long hair for guys. Short hair for gals.
    - f) If you ever saw the original movie *Footloose*, that was pretty much the history of my life.
  - 2. Pretty much anything that Christians wanted to wag the finger of shame at was labelled as worldly, and shoved into the abyss of God's displeasure.
  - 3. This made Christians very weird and very isolated.
  - 4. But the more I studied the Bible, the more I realized that worldliness was something radically different.
  - 5. The biblical word is *kosmos*. *Kosmos*, in this context, doesn't mean the birds in the air or the clouds in the sky. It means the arrangements, the philosophies, the beliefs, and the worldview of a society. Especially when that society is overrun by illusions and lies.
  - 6. Some experts translate *kosmos* as "world-system" and I think that's good. So James says that friendship with the world-system is hostility with God. John says that if anyone loves the world-system, the love of the Father is not in them.
  - 7. We're working our way to a definition of worldliness, so stay with me.
  - 8. To really define worldliness, we have to add one more element. That is, its driving force.
  - 9. According to the Bible, the driving force of worldliness is the devil himself.
    - a) *We know that we are of God, and the whole [world-system] lies under the sway of the wicked one. (1 John 5:19, NKJV)*
  - 10. The whole world-system is DUI—driving under the influence of Satan.

11. The devil has his acid spit on everything. Morals. Philosophies. Sexuality. Culture. Society.
  12. There's an incredible event in the Bible when the devil tempted Jesus. Three times, our Lord—weakened, tired, and hungry—faced the toughest temptations the devil could launch.
    - a) *Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. "Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." (Luke 4:5-7, NKJV)*
  13. This was a real temptation. The devil said, "this has been delivered me." What was delivered him? The power over the world-system. When God created the world, he made it beautiful, and sinless, and good.
  14. He created humans as the pinnacle of creation, and made us in his own image. Then he gave Adam and Eve the scepter of the world. But the devil came and tempted Eve, and Eve tempted Adam, and Adam surrendered the scepter of planet earth to the devil. All these things—the kingdoms of the world and their glory—have been delivered to the devil.
  15. The whole world-system lies under the sway of the wicked one.
    - a) Jesus called the devil the Ruler of this World-System (John 12:31).
    - b) Paul called the devil the God of this Age (2 For 4:4).
    - c) John says that the devil deceives the whole world (Rev 12:9).
    - d) And here is the biggest problem of all:
      - (1) The devil lurks in the background of his lies, and people who fall for them don't even know he's there.
      - (2) *And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14, NKJV).*
      - (3) *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." (Matthew 7:15, NKJV).*
      - (4) *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8, NKJV).*
  16. Worldly people are not bad people; they are deceived people. They are confused people. They are men and women and students who have been seduced by the dark side, and don't even know it happened.
  17. Except for one really huge clue:
    - a) *living by worldly philosophy is frustrating and pointless, and ends in a frantic search for a happiness that is always out of reach.*
  18. That's a sign to check your core beliefs, because maybe you've been swallowed by the roaring lion.
  19. What is worldliness?
    - a) Worldliness is unwitting allegiance to philosophies, values, morals, and opinions that have been poisoned by the spit of satanic delusions.
    - b) Worldliness is spiritual drunk-driving. It is a soul in revolt against God.
    - c) You cannot embrace worldliness and love God at the same time, because those are mutually contradictory things.
    - d) And, just to make it more crazy, everything around you preaches the gospel of worldliness all the time. You can't escape it by accident.
  20. Illusions: Escaping the Matrix. Waking up from the dream. Shaking off the Zombie state and becoming fully alive in the will and ways of God.
- B. *What are some features of worldliness?*
1. *HEARTBREAKING. Worldliness as a way of life is a heartbreak waiting to happen.*
    - a) What is truth? Truth is reality.
    - b) What is truth? Truth is reality as good sees it, God experiences it, God reveals it, and God defines it.
    - c) When you align your life with God's truth, everything works right.
      - (1) When you align your sexuality with God's truth...
      - (2) When you align your relationships, and marriage, and dating, and friendships with God's truth...
      - (3) When you align your sources of comfort with God's truth...
      - (4) When you align your finances with God's truth...
      - (5) When you align your morality with God's truth...
        - (a) That's when your heart feels satisfied and healthy and whole. Jesus said he came so you could have an abundant, full, radiant, joyful, overflowing life (John 10:10)
    - d) But when you fight against God's truth, that's when you're headed for a breakdown. No one can break God's truth. You can only break yourself against God's truth. And worldliness is a way of battering your heart against the rock of reality.
      - (1) You may gain the world, but you'll lose your soul. Worldliness is a heartbreak waiting to happen. It is heartbreaking.
  2. *NORMAL. What the Bible brands as worldliness, the world calls NORMAL.*

- a) Don't get me wrong, but here me out. If you're not a little weird, you're doing your Christianity wrong.
  - b) By weird, I don't mean unstable. I don't mean judgmental. I don't mean off-putting.
  - c) By weird, I mean different in ways that make lost people take notice.
  - d) I am reading a biography of Mrs. Oswald Chambers. Some of you know the devotional book she wrote after her husband died, called *My Utmost For His Highest*. There's a great story in there.
    - (1) Back in the 1800s in England, Bidy Chambers, and her husband Oswald, ran a small Bible college. The cook and her husband were stealing food, and stealing silver, and stealing stuff from the school, little by little. The students caught on first. They told Mr. and Mrs. Chambers.
    - (2) Mr. and Mrs. Chambers decided to wait and to pray. They didn't say anything. All the food that was stolen, Mrs. Chambers replaced with her own money. The chef and the cook started noticing this, but still kept on stealing.
    - (3) Every time a student pointed out the theft, the Chambers just told them to pray.
    - (4) After a couple of weeks, the chef and the cook came to Mr. and Mrs. Chambers. They were deeply apologetic and ashamed. They confessed their guilt... and Mr. Chambers said, "We knew you were doing it. But we wanted it to be God who pointed it out."
    - (5) Now that is weird. But it is beautifully weird. And that chef and her husband became Christians.
  - e) What the world calls normal, the Bible calls worldly.
    - (1) Sexual expression outside of marriage. Entitlement mentality. Taking from others as a way of life. Living by the sweat of another person's brow. Protesting. Violence. Disrespect. Diminishing the sacredness of life in any form. Cheating.
  - f) The world does not know what normal is, because the world is drunk on the devil's lies. Don't listen. You have a new normal. Finding and following God. Walking where Jesus was walking. Thinking God's thoughts after him, and believing a truth that the world can't even begin to see.
    - (1) *Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold (Rom 12:2, Phil).*
3. *SUBTLE. Worldliness presents itself as noble, good, and true, and it's hard to spot its lies.*
- a) American money is basically green and black. If I were printing counterfeit money, what color would I make it? Basically green and black.
  - b) Why? Because I want the counterfeit to look as close to the original as possible. And that is exactly the devil's plan with worldliness. He doesn't want to be unlike God. He wants to be like God (Isa 14:14).
  - c) We could state the devil's agenda this way: His primary agenda is to DISPLACE God and to REPLACE God—And do it in ways that are so subtle we don't realize it's happening. He flies below the radar.
  - d) The devil's message sounds a lot like God's message, but there is no Jesus, no Cross of Christ, no sin that we need saving from, no salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, and no Bible.
  - e) Worldliness is religious, but without the Jesus of Scripture. Worldliness is good, but without the presence of God in the world. The devil is dedicated to a good world. If he had the power, he would eliminate crime. He would eliminate poverty. He would eliminate war. The devil wants to be like Christ. A counterfeit Christ. As close to the real thing as he can be.
  - f) And this is why it's hard to spot his lies. They sound good. They sound Biblical and true.
    - (1) *At a time when you should be teaching others, you need teachers yourselves to repeat to you the ABC of God's revelation to men. You have become people who need a milk diet and cannot face solid food! For anyone who continues to live on "milk" is unable to digest what is right--he simply has not grown up. "Solid food" is only for the adult, that is, for the man who has developed by experience his power to discriminate between what is good and what is evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14, Phil).*
    - (2) Worldliness has a counterfeit grace: it is grace without the cross of Christ and his shed blood.
    - (3) Worldliness has a counterfeit gospel: it is making the world a better place, and being kind.
    - (4) Worldliness has a counterfeit Jesus: he is a good moral teacher who wasn't virgin born, didn't die for sins, didn't rise from the dead, and isn't coming again, except in some fuzzy, spiritual way to make us all nice.
    - (5) Worldliness has a counterfeit morality: never judge anybody except the person who judges anybody.
  - g) The reasons illusions exist is because there is a battle going on. It is a battle for your mind. At its deepest level, it is waged by the devil. He longs to drag you away from God. At its everyday level, the devil's lies are often passed on by well meaning but very confused people. People who have believed a lie. People who have been sucked into what the Bible calls "strong delusion."
  - h) There is battle for your mind. But it's not always in your face. It is underground. It is subtle. Sly. Sneaky. A battle of gentle persuasion. Seemingly innocent questions. Innocuous insinuations. Seducing you to the dark side, and you don't even know it's happening.
    - (1) We need critical thinking because the world is so sneaky.

(2) And we can't have critical thinking God's way unless we are loaded up on Scripture. God's truth, God's theology, God's doctrines, God's teachings, God's promises, God's commands, God's heart.

4. *DEFINING STORY. Worldliness offers a box top picture to put together the disconnected pieces of your life and your world, but... the pieces don't fit.*

a) We get our truth in bits and pieces. A little here, a little there. We get snippets of truth in different times, at different places, from different teachers, and experiences.

b) They are like pieces of a gigantic puzzle.

c) There's a deep drive inside the human heart to put all those pieces together.

(1) Worldliness offers a box top picture to put those pieces together.

d) Another way of saying the same thing is this. I said, there is a battle for your mind. But I want to push this even deeper. I want to talk about the WAY the battle for your mind plays out.

e) It is a battle of stories. Defining stories. Big stories. Cultural myths. Or, to use the annoying language of philosophy, a battle of meta-narratives. I am not a fan of that word. A meta narrative is a giant, pre-packaged story that explains your life and your world. You're part of a much bigger story. It is a structured story. It is made of many parts, and the parts fit together like pieces of a puzzle.

(1) There's the secular atheist story:

(a) The cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be. There is nature, and nothing above it. Everything is the interaction of matter and energy. There is no god, no eternity, no afterlife, no prayer, no rational faith, no angels, no devil, no heaven, and no hell. All life is the product of random chance — chemical ping pong balls bouncing in an energy soup.

(b) This is the story being aggressively pushed in top universities, media, politics, science, and government.

(2) The new age spiritualistic story:

(a) All is one and all is god and god is in you and you are in god, and you are god. All things merge into one cosmic consciousness in the end.

(b) This is the story being aggressively pushed in media, entertainment, social sciences, and the arts.

f) I'm saying that the worldly philosophy is a package deal. It is one big story. And the only sin is to question the story you're being told. To resist it and push back against the story. That makes you dangerous. Do not be fooled.

g) The world is vicious about protecting its story. It wants no competitors. Because once they erased the supremacy of God, something had to take the place of God. Something has to be supreme. That something has become the story and the people who tell it.

(1) They have deified themselves. They have deified their narrative.

(a) And their wrath rains down on anyone who pushes back against them.

(b) And the sad thing, is this narrative always breaks your heart.

(2) *Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the [world-system], and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8, NKJV).*

h) There is a battle for your mind, which is to say, there is a battle over which story of the universe you will believe. And as long as you go along with the collective, you will be popular and rewarded.

i) But the moment you call out the lies, you are branded as dangerous. Nothing will stop them from tearing you apart. You are in a war. Aren't you glad you came to church?

j) There is good news. It is a winnable war.

k) Because we have a defining story that is the most beautiful, life-affirming, transcendent story ever told. It begins with In the Beginning, God created the heaven's and the earth.

l) And the moment you get that big story programmed into your soul, you will rise in victory for the first time over the philosophies of the world, you stand as a champion of grace, and you will experience the love of God in your heart like you have never known before.

C. *How do we as Christians avoid the traps of worldliness?*

1. Answer: By consistent progress along the Grace Pathway.

2. The Bible isn't a million things. It's one simple, clear, patterned way of life. God saves you. God blesses you. God grows you. God uses you. If you get on that pathway, you will live the miracle of a God-blessed life.

a) *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5, NKJV).*

3. That is how you escape the matrix of illusions and worldliness, and take your stand on the sunny highlands of God's amazing grace.