

## 1 John 5:19

[1 John 5:19](#) says,

**1Jn 5:19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway of the wicked one.***

In [1 John 5:19](#) John states that as believers that we know two specific things: (1) “**we know that we are of God**”, and (2) we know that the whole world lies under the power of Satan.

It seems from a very logical perspective that John is simply reinforcing what he has previously stated in v18 that believers cannot be “**touched**” by Satan. Here, however, John is emphasizing that the world is unknowingly and constantly being influenced by the devil. Contextually, the word “**lies**” or “**lies under**” means to be in or under the power of someone.<sup>1</sup> John is specifically stating that the world is under a great deception of which they are not even aware. They never understand and they never perceive that they are being controlled, dominated, and influenced by Satan and his agenda for their life – which is clearly eternal destruction.

Now, it is important to understand the implications of the latter part of v19 because it can have either a positive or a negative slant to it. If we take this verse in relation to v20 where John says that God has given believers an “**understanding**”, then v19 helps the believer to see the world from a truly biblical perspective. Those who are of the world are spiritually blind, spiritually unconscious, and completely ignorant of what is happening to them. They are constantly being deceived so that they will believe the lies of Satan that he unknowingly perpetrates on them. It is interesting that the term “**wicked one**” is used eight (8) times in the New Testament, and five (5) of those times are in [1 John - 1 John 2:13, 2:14, 3:12, 5:18, 5:19](#). Two of the other times are in [Matthew 13:19](#) in the Parable of the Sower and then Jesus explanation of the parable in [Matthew 13:38](#).

**Mt 13:19** **When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.**

**Mt 13:38** **The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.**

Then, the last place that the term is used is in [Ephesians 6:16](#) which says,

**Eph 6:16** **above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.**

The Greek word for “**wicked one**” is “*poneros*” and is derived from “*ponos*” which simply means hurtful. The root word “*ponos*” refers to labor that demands the greatest effort in order to accomplish what it wants to accomplish. It is the idea that the devil is working as hard and as tirelessly as he can to harm the believer. The connotation that is always associated with this word is that of “evil”. When the term is not translated as “**evil one**” or “**wicked one**” (8X), it is generally translated as “**evil**” or “**wicked**” another 70+ times. The term defines a very active form of evil in which the end result of its influence is always painful.<sup>2</sup> The problem that is always the case with the devil is that he is out of sight, and therefore out of mind. There is absolutely no advantage to him for someone to know that he is trying to destroy their life. His biggest lie that many people buy into is that he does not even exist, so at that point they

have no benchmark for measuring the degree of his work against them. People just live their normal lives completely oblivious to the extremely subtle efforts that the devil is working against them and their families - and no one, not even a Christian, is exempt from his destructive activity. He is in no hurry. He does not care how long the weakening and deception process lasts. His goal is an eternal one – to destroy people’s lives where ultimately they die in their sins without Christ. No one is so spiritual that the devil decides that they are not worth the time or the effort needed to destroy their life. [John 10:10](#) expresses it this way,

**Jn 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.**

This work of the devil in people’s lives is always ongoing whether they sense it or not. The promise that was gleaned from [1 John 5:18](#) is that the devil does not have a green light to “touch” or harm a believer. However, that does not prevent the believer from opening up their life to his deception or his evil temptations. When a believer consciously and knowingly moves outside of the truth, they lose God’s protection that has been granted to them. God’s protection is found and maintained through obedience to the guidance that He gives in His Word.

I have mentioned often about the “culture shift” that is constantly moving believers away from Christ, and away from a deep commitment to obedience and to the Word of God. It is virtually imperceptible while it cleverly moves believers away from a commitment to Christ and His church which is designed to be a strong haven of protection for both the individual and their families. As the spirit of the Laodicean church age continues to impose its weakening and deluding influence on families, what is important is that a local church maintain its overriding commitment to be faithful to the Word of God no matter what slant the culture may want to impose on it. For the children, they are not only in very formative years where their future inclinations and propensities are being quietly shaped in their childhood – either good or bad, but in reality they are the target of the culture shift. What they will be inclined to do spiritually in the near future will be greatly impacted by what their parents develop in their lives today.

However, do you know what the “culture shift” really is? It is the “thief” at work. It is the “evil one” making people very comfortable in their cultural Christianity and amputating as much of their long-term commitment to Christ and His church as he possibly can. It is an unseen reality that is quietly destroying the fabric of the spiritual culture in which we live. It is a criminal mastermind imposing his deviant will on those who are unsuspecting and undiscerning. Hopefully everyone understands that the age of Laodicea is alive and kicking and that no Christian is exempt from its deluding influence. The shift is generally unrecognizable as it slowly erodes biblical values in unassuming ways. We can always see its results after the fact, but rarely do we see the shift actually taking place. No one is exempt from the very subtle cultural shift that has quietly made Christianity to be a very “lukewarm” religion. In [Revelation 3:16](#) Jesus says that kind of Christianity has no value to Him and is spiritually worthless. Certainly, we cannot consider that much of an encouragement.

Contextually, the word “wicked one” or “evil one” (NIV, AMP, ESV, NASB, ASV, ISV) is referring specifically to the devil. It is the idea that the very nature of Satan is one that that is evil and always in every way wants to bring grievous harm to someone’s life. He never has a good intent. His motive is always to hurt and to destroy. The evil that John speaks about is wicked, malicious, and is the kind of

evil that not only corrupts the individual, but also corrupt those surrounding that individual. Spiritual indifference and lack of commitment to the things of God never happens in a spiritual vacuum, but always has an impact on other people. It is amazing that probably the number one criticism of the modern church is that it is full of hypocrites. For the most part, there is only one reason why people can even say that. It is because in many cases it is true. Many professing believers say that they are deeply committed to Christ, but in actuality that is very distant from reality. The problem is that those who have no significant intention of allowing their spiritual commitment to go beyond what they want it to have created a kind of cultural Christianity with which they are very comfortable. They have culturally redefined what it means to live the Christian life so that they can be comfortable with spiritual mediocrity, but their redefinition does not mean that it aligns with the New Testament definition of biblical Christianity.

Just think of the contrast that John is providing here when he says that believers are “**of God**” and the whole world is “**of the devil**”. Think of it this way. There should always be a very marked and clear-cut distinction between someone who is truly saved and someone who is not. It cannot just be a verbal contrast, a difference of opinions, or a variation of ideas – not at all. The differences must be in terms of how someone actually lives out the Christian life and not what they may say about it. Believers have the mind of Christ and unbelievers reject Christ. Believers and unbelievers literally live in two completely different worlds. The believer thinks and responds one way, and the unbeliever thinks and responds a completely different way. This is always the way that the New Testament speaks of the believer and the unbeliever – as complete opposites.

Unfortunately, the modern church has made havoc of these biblical distinctions so that often times it is very difficult to differentiate between the lost and the saved. Many who claim to be saved often times seem to live like the world and the unsaved are very often allowed to casually and without any discernment whatsoever become members of a church so that the distinctions become greatly blurred. This should never be. What John has clearly taught from the very first chapter is that the differences between a saved person and a lost person should be so obvious that there is never a question. Believers are of God and live a life controlled by God and the lost are of the devil and live a life controlled by the devil. If the differences are not obvious and readily discernible, then in essence the church has completely lost its will to be discerning and most likely has allowed unbelievers to become a part of their membership. Warm bodies equal revenue – right?

No wonder the modern church seems to be in a state of utter confusion. It is because for the last 50 years the church has desperately tried to imitate the world in order to attract the world into its midst. Nothing could be more unbiblical and undiscerning than that approach. If there are no distinctions between Christians and non-Christians, then the church will never be able to impact the world in which it lives. The greater the distinctions, the greater will be the impact that the church will make on an unbelieving world. The gospel is not a message designed to accommodate and oblige what the world wants – and the church needs to understand that simple truth. It has great implications to the approach that the church takes relative to reaching the lost. Accommodation will eventually lead to utter spiritual indifference on the part of the world towards the church. Believers must remain distinct, different, separate, and clearly conspicuous from the world. Anything else is a spiritual travesty. We are not to think like the world, not to act like the world, and not to talk like the world. We are not to build our lives around the temporal

values of the world, but around the eternal values of God’s kingdom. Believers may be in the world, but they are not of the world. Believers may be in the world, but they cannot allow the world to be in them. Why? It is because of what John is clearly teaching in this verse – “**the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one**”.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Zodhiates, 855

<sup>2</sup> Strong, 1325.

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