



URBAN CURRENT

Being a believer in an urbanized world

The trend is clear. Just over 50 percent of the world population lives in urban centers. That's up from 9 percent in 1900 and headed for 60 percent by 2030. Do we understand that the remaining population is urbanized though they live outside urban centers? That is, the effect of urban centers on the rest of the world is immediate, direct, profound, pervasive, dramatic, and inescapable.

An urbanized world is compressed, fast-paced, dominating, pluralistic. It is multi-cultural and mobile. It is sexualized. It's commercialized and politicized. It is materialistic, demonized. It is promising, punishing. Stimulating, stressful. Exhilarating, exhausting.

We all live in this urbanized world. Do we understand the challenge of living out our faith in this world? If you knew you were going to take a long walk in the desert, wouldn't that inform how you prepare? If you were hiking through the jungle, wouldn't the environment dictate your preparation and precautions? What do we need to know about being a believer in a world that's been urbanized?

Paul, the consummate urbanite, a sophisticated cosmopolitan, moves from urban center to urban center with ease, knowledge, sensitivity, and influence. Nowhere is his spiritual wisdom more on display and more directly to the benefit of the believer than in Ephesians.

We recall the birth of this church in Acts 19. It's a story replete with dramatic miracles, sensational demonic confrontation, public declaration of faith, and a riot. Most importantly, a new band of converts forms a called-out assembly in an otherwise heathen city.

The pagan temple crowns the nearby peak, ruling over the metropolis swimming in perversity and depravity. The city is dominated by dark, demonic forces at work in crowded, bustling streets, beautiful public spaces and buildings, in baths, brothels, and bazaars.

Paul has quite a bit to say about being a

believer in an urbanized world. The well-known outline of Ephesians — wealth, walk, and warfare, guides us.

Through this circular letter, Paul builds up these urban believers emphasizing what they have received. God has blessed us, chosen us, predestined us, freely bestowed on us, lavished on us, and made known to us. We have nothing less than the riches of God's glory to draw upon in our daily lives. He stresses our being in Him (vs. 10, vs. 13). He emphasizes the power of God (1:19) and then brings it home to each believer saying that is the power that works in us (3:20).

How are you going to cope with the forces of humanism, pluralism, and demonized materialism? It certainly will not be from our own knowledge or strength. It will be in the wealth of our relationship to God through Jesus.

Paul introduces the ministry of the Holy Spirit (1:13, 3:16-20, 5:18). The typical believer will not be just knocked to his knees but knocked flat on his back without supernatural power.

The apostle warns us to walk in our new nature, deliberately laying aside the old self and putting on the new self. He warns us against sins that can take hold, corrupt, confuse, disarm, destroying our fruitfulness. Charging us to walk in love, to walk carefully. In an urbanized culture that assaults healthy relationships, he exhorts us to value, honor, and protect our families.

Near the end of the letter, Paul gives us the primary New Testament passage on spiritual warfare. I think he is the leading human authority on this subject.

The diluted, American Christianity of consumerism, depending on legal cover, social accommodation, and cultural appreciation, doesn't cut it. In the first century, Christianity is unsupported by cultural structures, institutional friendliness, or governmental favor. New Testament Christianity stands on its own two feet, victorious in the face of opposition. Could it be that one of the reasons we see so many Chris-

tians falling apart, so many pastors going astray, so many families disintegrating is that they have been ill-equipped for the spiritual warfare an urbanized world presents?

We are at war. The enemy is out to kill us. We have the victory. However, the victory is in a well-fought battle. If there is no battle, you don't need any armor. You don't need a shield to extinguish the flaming arrows if there are no flaming arrows. This is not the religion of "come to church once a week and I'll give you a little sermonette on how to manage your nice, little, white life." This is a blood and guts, battle to the death, spiritual conflict.

I love Paul's approach. He focuses on God, not Satan. He focuses on strength not weakness. He focuses on the spiritual not the physical. He focuses on the internal not the external. Having very carefully laid the groundwork in the opening of his letter, explaining our wealth and strength, he tells us we will be able to resist in the evil day and having done everything, to stand firm.

Let's face it. This urbanized world living is eating the lunch of many believers. A quick survey of Paul's urban experiences gives an overview of what we can expect today. God-believers who will turn on us, heathen who will attack us, demons that will oppose us. Yet, everywhere Paul went living a Gospel life, proclaiming a Gospel message, people were saved, churches were planted, God was glorified, the name of Jesus magnified and the number of disciples multiplied.

That's what being a believer in an urbanized world looks like. How are we doing?

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