

DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD

1 John 2:15-27

Key Verse: 15 “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.”

As we've been studying, the purpose of John's letter, is that we may have fellowship with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (1:3). We learned that if we say we have fellowship with God yet walk in darkness we lie (1:6). The structure of 1 John is like concentric circles each passage amplifying and further defining what is fellowship with God and what breaks fellowship with God, what is light and what is darkness. Thus far, we have considered that we are in the darkness when we claim to not be a sinner, when we sin with no desire to repent, when we hate a brother or sister. But we are in fellowship with God, walking in the light, when we confess our sins, trust in his forgiveness, keep his commands and love one another with God's love. Today we will think about another kind of darkness that breaks our fellowship with God: it is to love the world. There are times our relationship with God becomes distant, dry, dutiful. It is not always apparent what is the problem. But unless it is addressed it is possible to break our love relationship with him. This year our Chicago key verse is Revelation 2:4-5 that challenges us to repent and return to our first love. Today we're going to think about that: first how the love of the world breaks our love for God and second how to remain in him.

First, Do not love the world (15-17)

Verse 15 says, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.” First, we have to define our terms. What does it mean to love “the world”? “The world” is used 57 times in the gospel of John but each time it has a different meaning. Clearly it doesn't mean the people of the world. John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son.” God loves the people of the world and we should too. Nor does it mean the earth and created things. The world is God's creation and is good and displays God's glory. We are called to be stewards of the world. Some people think, “do not love the world” means to be detached from things and people, to get rid of all possessions, only drive a Camry, never take vacations, and don't enjoy family life—

that's actually the false teaching of Asceticism. "The world" here refers to the sinful fallen world. Jesus said in John 12:31, "Now is the time for judgment on **this world**; now the prince of **this world** will be driven out."¹ The world is fallen and full of sin. Satan is the prince or more properly ruler of this fallen world, that ancient serpent that leads the whole world astray (Rev 20:2). Under his dominion, everywhere we turn, every minute of the day there is temptation from within and without. John says, "that the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (5:19). Therefore he says, "Do not love the [sinful fallen] world or anything in the world [that causes sin]."

If anyone loves the sinful fallen world and the things that cause sin, love for the Father is not in them (15b). Verse 15 is a further explanation of what it means to walk in darkness (1:6). We could read it as, If we claim to love God but love the world, we lie and love for the Father is not in us. Some misread "Do not love the world" as "Do not love the world **[more]** than the Father." It doesn't say that. It says that if you love the one, you **can't** love the other. Loving sin is like drinking poison, even the smallest amount can kill our faith. When we love the sinful fallen world, we are choosing to find life, happiness, meaning and comfort in something other than God, in something that that he has said is evil, forbidden and harmful to us. In fact, love for the world is to decide to love Satan's lies instead of God's truth. If we imagine it as a marriage, if we begin to love someone outside our marriage, we will quickly fall out of love with our spouse. We can't love two people at the same time (Mt 6:24). James 4:4 says, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." Just as light and dark cannot coexist, so we cannot love God and Satan at the same time.

A Christian must have a serious attitude about sin—it is dangerous. Sin is rebellion against God. When Eve decided to eat the fruit she did so knowing she was rebelling against God, out of a desire to be her own god (Gen 3:6, cf Rom 1:21). Though the danger was so great, she did it anyway because it looked **so desirable**. Darkness has great power. If you are playing around with sin thinking that you can indulge in something and it won't affect your relationship with God, Watch Out! If your

¹ In that same passage Jesus says "I did not come to judge the world but to save the world" (Jn 12:47). This tells us that it is not the people and creation that Jesus tells us not to love but the sinful fallen world ruled by Satan.

relationship with God has become dead and cold, look at your heart seriously and ask yourself what it is that you are loving. Is there a guilty pleasure that you are indulging in secretly? Is there unforgiveness or even hatred that you have decided not to resolve? Is there a judgmental, critical, cynical thinking that you refuse to let go of? These are rebellion against God. Repenting of them is not optional, it is critical. Even the smallest sin that we refuse to bring to God will begin to make us slowly numb, and then cold, and finally kill our love for God, until we begin to hate him and his will. Many don't even realize what has happened to them, because like the Pharisees, they have boiled their relationship with God down to a contractual duty, like a dead and loveless marriage. And so when sin robs their love for God, they don't even notice the difference (I'm speaking from personal experience). John doesn't say that love for the world makes us lose legal justification. He says that we lose love for the Father. That love for the Father should be burning hot within us. When the love of God is burning within us, then we do not want even the smallest thing to come between us. If it is true, that if we love the world, love for the Father is not in us, then also the reverse is true also, that if we **love the Father** the love for the world is not in us. When we love God, and live in that deep love relationship, we can lose sight of the things of this world in comparison to the all surpassing worth of knowing him.

*“Turn your eyes upon Jesus;
Look full in his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace.”*

John gives three examples of worldliness within us, “the lust of the flesh” that is the sinful cravings, thinking, talking I feel constantly coming from within me. “The lust of the eyes” that is the things outside of me that fill me with sinful desires when I see them. And “the boastful pride of life” that desire within us to succeed over others, accumulate possessions, status and power. All of these things are not from the Father but from this fallen world (16). When we look lustfully at another person, that is not a natural characteristic of how God made us. That is something that became twisted within us at the fall. When we want to beat others and be above them that is not part of the DNA of humanity it is something we started to crave when we turned to sin and fell. Our snarky cynicism, pride, bravado, and self-sufficiency are not the way that God made us and therefore we must call them

what they are: sin. They are part of a fallen nature that deforms us and drags us down to hell. Ephesians 2:1-3 say, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”

The first step to being a Christian is that we must repent and believe the good news (Mk 1:15). There must be a conscious decision to leave behind the old nature and follow the new. “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal 5:24).” There must be a clear break. It doesn’t mean that I get a halo in the mail and change overnight. But it does mean that a Christian has a zero tolerance policy for sin. We no longer walk in the paths of sin but have decided to follow Jesus practically in our life. The Bible doesn’t only say “don’t love the world” in fact it says that we must “hate what is evil, cling to what is good” (Rom 12:9). In fact the word for hate is actually “abhor” be disgusted by it so that you absolutely revile it. How can we do this? One young man said, “When I sin I don’t feel bad about my sin. When I smoke pot, when I look at porn, and lie I don’t feel convicted, I don’t feel God is punishing me. They feel good in the moment. I don’t know how to hate sin.”² This young man hit the nail right on the head and it is in fact one of the major points of John’s letter. We all by default enjoy sin. To stop enjoying sin is not natural to this world. Like flies drawn to sugar, we are all drawn to the fleeting pleasures of sin (Heb 11:25)—and they do have a pleasure, if they didn’t, no one would do them. Then if there is something that I love to do, how can I suddenly not love it anymore, in fact hate it? There’s nothing in this world that could, for example, make me stop loving my children and start hating them. To stop loving what I love, I would need a new heart. And here’s the point, John’s letter teaches us that **to walk in real fellowship with God, we must be born again**. These verses don’t teach us to try harder, screw up our willpower and just do it. They teach us that there is a nature in us that must fundamentally change. Verses 15-17 flow straight out of 12-14. It is only when we overcome the evil one through the new birth by the Holy Spirit that we can hate the world. In one beautiful sermon

² <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/my-sin-feels-good-in-the-moment-why-stop>

by Pope Francis he said, “God’s law could be reduced to a beautiful façade of a life that is still the life of a slave and not children. Often, behind that pharisaical mask of asphyxiating correctness, something ugly and unresolved is hiding...Instead, we must let ourselves be unmasked by the commandments’ in order to reveal one’s spiritual poverty and be led to ‘a holy humiliation,’ recognizing one’s failings and pleading to God for salvation.”³ As the letter of John has been teaching us, we must come into the light, face who we really are and not try to pretend but beg God to transform our heart that we may love what he loves and hate what he hates.

In preparing this message, I was deeply confronted with my love for the world and the shallowness of my love relationship with God. I thought my sins of pride and hatred were justified and so I was not facing them. I was not being honest with God about my lust, anger and discontent and so I was not allowing God to remove these blockages in my relationship with him but praying the same shallow, insincere prayers night after night. I was not bringing my true self to God but a façade pretending that I could be good enough on my own. But I cannot change myself. From that time, I’ve been praying, begging God to change my heart and help me to sincerely love him.

Ultimately, we must have a right view of this world. “This world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever” (17). Ask yourself are you willingly letting go of the sinful things of this life out of hope for the eternal life to come? Or is God going to have to pry those things out of your hands at the gates of his city? Are you living to quickly enjoy as much of the pleasure of the world as you can before Christ comes? When we look at the pleasures right in front of us it is hard to believe that there are greater pleasures I could be living for. But the desires of this world will pass away, because they are not worth comparing with the all surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. Jesus said that to know God *is* eternal life. Nothing can compare with the love of God. The Christian life *is* to live in his love, that is the eternal source of life both now and forever. Only a fool would trade the immeasurable joy and love of God for the fleeting pleasures of sin for such a short time. May God help us to walk in the light.

³ <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-chronicles/people-must-confront-their-evil-desires-beg-god-mercy-pope-says>

Second, Remain in him (18-27)

This last section of the letter deals with heretics who loved the world and caused great pain to the church. Verse 18 says, “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.” We are in the last hour of God’s history. The last hour began at the crucifixion of Jesus and since then, God has sent his angels to the four winds to gather his elect from every corner of the earth (Mt 24:31). There is only one thing that is left to come in God’s history and that is Jesus’ second coming which could happen at any time. Jesus warned his disciples in Matthew 24 that in this last hour we would need to watch out for many false messiahs and false teachers that would lead us astray—and this is probably what John is referring to here.

In fact, sadly, the false teachers, that were probably the reason for writing this letter, had come from their own congregation. John says, “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us” (19). Now let’s be clear, these are not people who left the church to go to another church. They are people who left the faith and denied that Jesus is the Christ and showed that they were never really believers (22). John is making a powerful statement here about the grace of God. He is saying that once someone has truly believed in Jesus and tasted the grace and love of God they could never, *never* leave him. If anyone leaves faith in Christ, they were not really born again. And that is really the crux of the matter. It is very easy to intellectually believe in the creed and even the morality and theology of the gospel and still not be truly born again. The former only requires adherence to doctrine but the later requires transformation that only God can do. Verse 20 says, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.” This kind of knowing is an inner perception of the truth rather than head knowledge.

Most likely those who left the church were teaching an early form of Gnosticism that denied that Jesus came in the flesh as the Son of God. Because they believed that the only thing necessary for salvation was knowledge, “gnosis,” there was no need for a Savior. They believed they could have the Father and reject the Son but

they were liars (22-23). They were liars, because truly at the root of their “religion” was a desire to love the world. I’m sure they came superficially, said the prayers, recited the creed and were probably even baptized with tears. They shared fellowship, maybe gave sacrificially, and did many good works. However, at their core they did not ever face the reality of who they were and what they really desired and so they never allowed Christ to transform them by the Spirit. Now, we see the outcome of those who are only religious but don’t actually stop loving the world. I hope you see the great warning, the red flag, the very present danger for us.

John had to assure this church and clarify to them, because to their eyes these people were their brothers and sisters and it seemed that Christ had failed or that salvation wasn’t real. They were deeply hurt, torn, betrayed and confused. But John continues to give us several litmus tests throughout the letter for recognizing that they were not real believers in the first place. We must ask ourselves where am I going to for salvation? Am I practically trying to get to the Father without Jesus? Or do I come to him honestly, as a totally bankrupt sinner, in dire need of his mercy? How precious is Jesus to you?

We also need a discerning eye for errant theology in our times. I was shocked a few years ago that whenever I made PowerPoint for the message, that all best, most biblical pictures were from the Mormons. And the gold standard for choral recordings? Again the Mormon Tabernacle Choir! So, I began to research it. For years they’ve been asking the Christian community to accept them as Christians. They have tons of beautiful videos on YouTube that sound pretty similar to our life testimonies, and great art and music—surely they can’t be that bad. But then you dig a little deeper and you find that they don’t believe that Jesus is God. And it starts getting weird after that with aliens and spirit children, it is man-made lies. There are many more trendy errant theologies like Universalism or Triumphalism that stop people from repenting and coming to Jesus, we need eyes to recognize the lies.

In contrast to strange and complicated teachings, John says “see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you” (23). If you do, you will remain in the Father and have eternal life (24b-25). What is it they had heard from the

beginning? It is simply the gospel. To keep ourselves grounded in Christ and the unshakable truths of our faith, we must always, always come back to the gospel. When we come to the truth that Jesus died for the sins of the world, we must face the fact that I am a sinner who can never, ever be good enough on my own, I need a savior. And I have one in Jesus, who loved me so much that he shed his precious blood for such an undeserving sinner like me. When I consider Jesus who rose again from the dead proving that he has the power to do all that he has promised then I put my hope in heaven and not in living for this world. Going through the pattern of this gospel every day centers our Christian life and keeps us from going astray. There is always some trendy new teaching that tries to lead us astray from the simple gospel (26). John says that when we doubt we need to simply look inside and remember how we were changed when we simply accepted the gospel and received the Holy Spirit (27a). By the Spirit's power we can remain in him.

What have we learned today? I hope it is Jesus. Love Jesus, remain in Jesus, come to Jesus, turn your eyes upon Jesus and all the things of this world will fade away. Let's all examine our hearts if we are really living in a burning hot love relationship with the Father or if some foolish sin is robbing us of the life, love and power we should be experiencing. I pray that all of us may truly be born again and by the power of that anointing we may forsake the world and remain in him to the end. May God be with us. Amen.