

Love Not The World

1 John 2:15-16

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The passage I want to look at this morning is 1 John 2:15-17. This is a familiar text for most of you. It's a passage many of you have memorized.

One of the dangers of choosing a well-known text like this is that some people tune out early, thinking this is familiar ground and you're not going to hear much that is fresh or challenging. But I want to encourage you to stay with me this morning, because I am going to try to get beyond that layer of familiarity and show you this passage with a whole new richness of meaning.

Our passage this morning clearly outlines the main points of vulnerability at which Satan aims his attacks against us all. In this passage we have a brief survey of the three worst pitfalls this world has to offer.

Let me read the passage:

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.

16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.

**17 And the world is passing away along with its desires,
but whoever does the will of God abides forever.**

Christian warfare is a lifelong battle against three great enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil. Here we see how those three enemies work together. John is specifically writing about the world and how we are not to love the world. But when he enumerates the specifics of worldliness, what he actually lists are the sinful tendencies of our corrupt nature—what Scripture calls "the flesh." And putting this passage together with everything Scripture tells us about how Satan tempts us, we discover that these three danger zones are the very areas where the evil one aims his fiery darts of temptation.

So the world and the flesh, and the devil are in collusion together, and the remedy against one is the remedy against the other.

I want to start by stressing that truth, because it is a point many people seem confused about. People love to blame the world or the devil when they do wrong, but there is never a time when other people—or even Satan himself—can lure us into sin unless our own fleshly depravity yields and cooperates with the world and the devil. James 1:14-15 says, **"Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin."**

And furthermore, **"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it"** (1 Corinthians 10:13). When Satan is successful in tempting us, it is invariably because we yielded. We cannot escape the blame for our sin by claiming it was Satan or the world—rather than our own fleshliness—that drove us to sin. The *world*, the *flesh* and the *devil* all work together.

During one of my trips to India a few years ago I met a college student who approached me after a meeting where I taught. He said he believed he was suffering under an intense Satanic attack, and he wondered if I knew of any special methods of spiritual warfare that could help rid his home and family of Satanic influences.

So I asked about the nature of the attack he was under. He said he was finding it impossible to get along with his mother. He said the two of them hardly ever spoke a civil word to one another, and it was destroying the peace of their household. He said he found it hard to study the Bible or grow spiritually as long as these tensions ruled the household. And he was hoping I would tell him how he could get Satan out of his household.

I first asked him what made him think this problem was uniquely *Satanic*. As he described it to me, it sounded much more like raw carnal pride on both his part and his mother's.

They were constantly saying unkind and unloving things to one another. He purposely did things he knew would annoy her. He spoke disrespectfully to her. He stated quite clearly that he couldn't stand her and didn't like being around her. It sounded like youthful rebellion on his part, more than a satanic attack.

So I told him that. I said, "It sounds to me like you're just behaving in a fleshly way. I think you need to look into your own heart for the culprit, rather than blaming the devil and outside influences."

But he insisted that I just didn't understand the issue. It *must* be Satanic, he said, because the nature of his conflict with his mother was so powerful, and living with her was like living with the devil. And when I raised my eyebrow at that, he quickly added that he couldn't help himself; the temptation to speak hatefully to her was so overpowering, it was as if evil forces took over his mind.

I told him first of all, that regardless of Satan's involvement in his home, the root sin causing his problems was fleshly, carnal *pride*. I also reminded him that when he sinned with his tongue, he was sinning deliberately of his own accord, so he couldn't escape his own responsibility by blaming Satan for the turmoil in his household. But I told him I agreed that his trouble was probably also demonic. After all, James 3:6 says, "**The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members,**

staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell." I also reminded him that according to 1 Samuel 15:23, "**Rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.**" By indulging in that kind of rebellion, he was committing a sin as evil and as satanic as witchcraft. He was opening his own heart and life to Satan's influence, and he was giving Satan every opportunity to take advantage of him.

And then I told him, "I'm going to let you in on a secret. I'm going to give you a foolproof technique for spiritual warfare that is the most powerful and most potent defense against Satan you could ever employ. If you do what I say, and follow these instructions every time you are tempted to speak an unkind word to your mother, I guarantee this will solve your problem.

So he took out his pen and a piece of paper and prepared to take notes. And when he was looking at me expectantly, ready for the answer, I quoted James 4:7: "**Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**" And Ephesians 4:26-27: "**Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.**"

If Satan *doesn't* flee—if he is successful in luring you into sin—it is always because your own wicked heart agrees with him and cooperates with him, and so you do whatever sinful thing he has tempted you to do. When that happens, instead of blaming it on influences beyond your control, you need to

repent, and admit your own fleshly complicity with the devil, and resist him rather than cooperating with him. **"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith"** (1 Peter 5:8-9).

I could tell he wasn't pleased with my reply. He desperately wanted me to agree that his problems were completely caused by the devil, and that therefore this was completely outside his own heart and beyond his own control. If I had offered to come to his house and conduct some kind of ceremonial exorcism, I'm sure he would have taken me up on it immediately. But he was not prepared to admit that he was in any way culpable for the disharmony in his own home.

We'd all like to believe that our struggle with sin involves only external enemies. We're willing to say that Satan is to blame for our sin. We're even willing to blame the world—as long as it's an external cause. As long as we don't have to take the blame on ourselves.

But one of the things our text this morning reveals is that even our struggle with the world is a struggle that is fomented by inordinate desires that emanate from within ourselves. **"All that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world."** Have you ever thought about this? Those are sinful tendencies that come from within us.

We ourselves are to blame when inordinate worldly affections crowd out what should be a pure love for God and the things of God. Neither the world nor the devil could ever take advantage of us if our own flesh did not cooperate.

Now I want to approach this passage this morning with one purpose: to understand why it is here and what it is teaching us, so that we can apply its lessons in our lives—so that we have a healthy understanding of the struggle we wage against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and so that we can avoid the pitfalls that are commonly exploited by all three of those great enemies. And I want to start by looking at the context of our passage. Then I want to close in for a broad look at the passage itself. And finally I want to home in on verse 16, and examine these three monumental hazards to our spiritual well-being. So if you're taking notes, we're going to look at this passage through three lenses. First, we'll take the wide-angle view. Then we'll consider this passage through a normal lens. Then we'll get out a microscope and home in on the details of verse 16. First:

1. A LOOK AT THE CONTEXT

Let's begin by looking at the context of the verses we are concerned with this morning. The apostle John is writing to encourage his readers to examine their own hearts and lives to see whether they are in the faith. Throughout this epistle he gives them a number of tests. There's a doctrinal test, a moral test, and a *character* test.

You see the doctrinal test, for example, in verses 22-23: **"Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also."** You see the doctrinal test again in chapter 4, verses 2-3: **"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already."** You want to know who is a true believer and who is not? Look first at their doctrine. Take note of what they teach. Because those who deny the Christ of Scripture, as well as those who deny the true gospel of justification by faith are not true Christians. That is why we oppose the many movements that are so popular today to try to forge some type of earthly unity among all the diverse groups that label themselves Christians. Not everyone who claims to be a believer really is, and those who corrupt or deny the core, essential truths

about Christ are certainly not Christians. In his second epistle (2 John 10-11), John writes, **"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works."**

So that's one kind of test to see whether we are true Christians. It's a doctrinal test.

John also gives a moral test—a test of *behavior*. Look at verses 4-6: **"Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."** The behavioral test is repeated numerous times in this first epistle of John. Look, for example, at chapter 3, verses 6-8:

No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. [and he's talking about our *practice* here, the habit of your life, the characteristic that defines your whole life. If your life is characterized only by sin and wickedness, then you are not a Christian. If your life reveals growth and progression in righteousness, then you are born of God.]

7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

That's the moral test—the test of obedience. You'll find similar statements throughout this epistle, and this is why we reject the notion that some Christians live carnal lives no different from unregenerate people, with no true love for God, no concern for holiness, and no pattern of obedience to the commands of God. The apostle John says here that the one who is truly born of God *cannot* live a life like that.

And there's a third major test—a character test. This is the test of *love*. What do you love? Whom do you love? That is important evidence of whether you are truly born again or not. You see this summed up in 1 John 3:14: "**We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.**" And according to the apostle John, loving one another is also how we show our love for *God*. First John 4:20 says, "**If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.**" Chapter 5, verse 2: "**By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.**"

And so there are these three major tests—the test of *doctrine*, the test of *obedience*, and the test of *love*. And they

each appear repeatedly throughout this epistle as John revisits each test several times. In a way, the entire epistle is John's own exposition of the statement he makes in chapter 1, verses 6-7: **"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."** That is the key statement of this epistle, and everything else he says simply expands and elucidates the meaning of that statement.

Now, beginning in verse 7 of chapter 2 he introduces what I have called the test of love. This was a very important issue with the apostle John. You may remember that he has been nicknamed "the apostle of love." And he begins to talk about the New Commandment. Verse 7: **"Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. [and it may look like he is contradicting himself here, but he isn't—verse 8:] At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining."**

Now what is this new commandment that isn't really new, but is the old commandment we have had from the beginning? He's referring to John 13:34, where Jesus says, "A

new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

So the new commandment is love. It's a new commandment because it is being formally issued here as the governing principle of our lives under Christ's New Covenant. But it's an old commandment, because it subsumes every aspect of the moral law that was given under the Old Covenant. Remember that Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40 that all the Old Testament moral law hangs on these two commandments: **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [And] you shall love your neighbor as yourself."** So **"love is the fulfilling of the law."** (Romans 13:10).

And here the apostle John begins to show how this principle of love is one of the tests of the true Christian. It is, in fact, the most conspicuous mark of the genuine believer. Jesus said in John 13:35, **"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

And John is building on that truth, which he had heard directly from the lips of Christ on the very night of His betrayal. And John writes in our chapter, 1 John 2:10-11: **"whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness."**

Now, this is the new commandment he is giving them. It's a commandment to love one another. And remember,

according to 1 John 5:20, implied in the commandment to love one another is a commandment to love God as well.

So he is giving them a commandment to love, and that covers verses 5-11. Verses 12-14 are a digression. Those verses are like a parenthetical side remark, where John addresses his audience as "**Fathers,**" "**young men,**" and "**little children.**" And his point there is that no matter what stage of spiritual growth you have reached, the same commandment governs you. This commandment to love is not merely the elementary starting point of the Christian faith, but it also sums up the duty of the most mature believer as well. Unlike gnosticism and some of the mystery religions, Christianity doesn't have a different set of principles for more advanced believers. The same overarching commandment governs everyone.

And now in our passage, beginning in verse 15, John begins to outline the negative side of this love. We are to love God and love our brethren. But there is a kind of love that is incompatible with righteous love. And so here the apostle pauses in his discourse to warn us against this dangerous false love.

Now this is vital, because there are a lot of people who want to make the principle of love a kind of ethereal goodwill that is strewn about indiscriminately on every conceivable object. In fact, in the culture of American Christianity, if you include the mainstream denominational

groups and everyone in our society who uses the label "Christian," I think it's fair to say that the prevailing notion of Christian charity in society at large is an idea of love that is always benevolent, always congenial, always positive about everything.

I hear this all the time. Years ago, when I first began to investigate and catalogue the Christian resources on the Internet, I made a large list of links to other Christian Web sites. And in order to keep them all straight in my own mind, and in order to help Christians who might not be very discerning about doctrinal dangers on the Internet, I classified my links to other web sites Web sites according to their doctrinal soundness. So there's large a category of links I have labeled helpful, and then there are other categories called "Bad Theology" and "Really Bad Theology." And then a few years ago I found I had to add a category called "Really, Really Bad Theology." And I've annotated every link on those pages to help explain *why* I categorize them as bad.

And to this day, nearly every week of my life, I get e-mail messages from people who are convinced that it is inherently unloving to label anyone else's ideas bad theology. And they write me to chide me for posting my disagreements with other Christians' doctrine on the Web.

But the love that is called for in the New Commandment is not a vague, indiscriminate congeniality. Real love for the truth necessarily involves hatred for error.

Or, as John says it here, the love for the Father rules out love for this world.

And so that is the context for this passage. It is a crucial part of the biblical commandments about love. It is the necessary balance of all righteous love. Every time you read a commandment in Scripture that tells us to love God and love the brethren, this converse commandment is implied: *Do NOT love the world.*

2. A BROAD LOOK AT THE PASSAGE

That's the context. Now consider the passage for what it says. We'll set aside the broad-angle lens and look at this passage through a our normal reading glasses. Let me read the passage again:

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.

16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.

17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Some people imagine a difficulty between this verse and another familiar passage, John 3:16: "**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.**" How is it that God loved the world, but he commands us not to?

Don't be confused by this. Here's a classic example of how words used in one biblical context might mean something completely different from the same words used in a different context—even by the same biblical author. The same John who wrote this epistle penned the gospel that bears his name. And if you compared John 3:16 with 1 John 2:15 in the Greek text you would discover that he uses the same Greek word for the noun "world" (which is *kosmos* in the Greek, both here and in John 3:16). And it's also the same Greek verb for the word "love" both here and in John 3:16. (It's *agapao* in the Greek).

If you use the method some people use, you might be tempted to conclude that these verses teach us that it's OK for God to love the world, but not for us. But the context is the key to the meaning both here and in John 3:16. And the context shows that between John 3:16 and 1 John 2:15, John uses the expression *kosmos* to mean two distinctly different things; and he uses the verb *agapao* to mean two distinctly different things.

Actually, *kosmos* can refer to many different things. It can mean this physical world—the planet earth—the material part of God's creation. Or it can mean the world of people, the human race in general terms. In fact, in John 3:16, the word *kosmos* speaks of people—the world of humanity; the human world.

But here in 1 John 2, we're told not to love the world. Does this mean we are not to love people? Obviously not. In fact, in Matthew 5:44, Jesus commanded us to love even our enemies. So this cannot mean that we're forbidden to love the world of people.

Does it mean that we're not to love the world of creation? We have to answer *no* to that, too. First Timothy 6:17 says "God . . . richly provides us with everything to enjoy." We're not to despise what he has created, but we're to enjoy it.

So what can this mean? Well, notice that right here in 1 John 2, John carefully defines what he means by *kosmos* in verse 16: "**All that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.**" He is describing the world of evil; the order of things that are ruled by Satan and stand in opposition to God. It is not the same "*world*" John speaks of in John 3:16. That was the world of people, which we are *commanded* to love. This is the world of evil, which we are *forbidden* to love.

We employ the English word like this all the time. We speak of the Wide, Wide World of Sports. The world of sports isn't a separate planet. It is that dominion of this world where athletic competition rules. It's an organized system. We speak of the world of finance, or the world of entertainment the same way.

So the word *kosmos* speaks of one thing in John 3:16, and it speaks of something entirely different here. This is speaking of the world of evil—that system that is governed by Satan, who in 2 Corinthians 4:4 is called "**the god of this world.**" Also, 1 John 5:19, John writes, "**the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.**" It is that wicked world system that

we are not supposed to love. It's everything evil and everything temporal about this world. We're not supposed to set our affections on it, as Colossians 3:2 says, "**Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.**" In 1 John 2:16, John says the evil system that governs this earthly world is characterized by lust and pride, and therefore it is not worthy of our affection.

Now look at *agapao*, the word translated "**love.**" In John 3:16 it speaks of a compassionate love for fallen humanity. God loved the world of people so much that he sent his Son to die and redeem a remnant through whom He would perpetuate this race in eternity. That speaks of a compassionate and redemptive love. The good of others is the object of this love.

But *agapao* in 1 John 2:15 means something entirely different. It speaks of a selfish affection, an inordinate attachment that grows out of sinful and fleshly appetites. John also makes this clear in verse 16. So once we understand the context, it eliminates any appearance of conflict between this verse and John 3:16.

Now I want to point out *why* John says we should not love the world of evil. He gives three reasons. The first is in verse 15:

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Love for this world is incompatible with the love of God. This is an echo of James 4:4: **"You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."**

In Luke 16:13, Jesus said, **"No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."** You cannot love God and love the system of evil that opposes Him.

Here's a second reason. Verse 16:

For all that is in the world . . . is not from the Father but is from the world. This may seem an obvious point, and I don't want to belabor it, but I cannot just pass over it, because every now and then I meet some overzealous young hyper-Calvinist who wants to argue that God's absolute sovereignty over the affairs of this world means He is even the source and creator of the evil in this world.

This verse clearly teaches otherwise. Evil is not from God. It emanates from a world that opposes Him. It is true that God is sovereign over evildoers. It is true that He circumscribes the limits to which they can go with their evil. It is even true that God *uses* evil for His own good purposes. It is also true that evil was part of His original plan and eternal decree for His creation, and it was not something that

crept in and caught Him by surprise. But still, God is neither the *source* nor the *author* of evil.

Evil is not a created thing. It is a defect owing to sin in something that God created perfect. Scripture is very clear about this. When God had ceased creating, He looked at all He had made, and He pronounced it "**very good**" (Genesis 1:31). There was no sin, and everything God had created was good. It was later marred by the sin of his creatures, but the source of that sin, that defect, is not God. The onset of evil was not an act of creation; it was an act of destruction. And God is in no sense the source or the efficient cause of it. These roots of all evil — "**the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions**" — are "**not from the Father**"; they are "**from the world.**" They pertain to the world. They belong to the evil system. They are in no way related to or derived from God.

And don't ever press your understanding of divine sovereignty to the point where you make God the author or approver or efficient cause of evil. I know there are some, even around Grace Church, who have flirted with blasphemous notions like that.

There's a third reason we're not to love the world. Verse 17:

And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. This world, together with all the evil in it, is temporary, transient, passing away. We're not to set our affections on such a temporary object. If you attach your affections to temporary objects, you yourself will be destroyed in the judgment of those evil things you love. Luke 17:32: "**Remember Lot's wife.**"

Jesus said, "**what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?**" (Mark 8:36). This world is transient, temporary. It is passing away. It is measly compensation to receive in exchange for your eternal soul. If you could gain the whole world and everything in it, it would not be enough to make up for the eternal loss of your soul.

Wouldn't it be tragic to spend your whole life pursuing the world—even if you could gain the whole world; even if you gained every material and worldly thing you ever sought—and then at the end you discover that everything you spent your lifetime pursuing is only temporal, not eternal? You would discover only after it is too late that you had forfeited a host of eternal blessings for something you could not keep anyway, because it is all just turning to dust. That will be the sad discovery multitudes will make when they stand before the throne of judgment.

That's a broad overview of the sense of this passage. Now we are ready to take out a microscope and take a closer look

at verse 16. Let's see how the apostle John characterizes "**all that is in the world.**"

A CLOSER LOOK AT ONE VERSE

Notice verse 16 again: "**For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.**"

There John enumerates three hazards to our spiritual well-being. As I pointed out at the beginning, if we were writing this ourselves analytically, we might think that the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life pertain to the flesh more than to the world or the devil. These are all sins of the flesh—sins of corrupt human nature.

But this is what John says characterizes the evil world we are commanded not to love. These fleshly failures set the agenda for the whole world system. Let's look at them one at a time:

The desires of the flesh. This speaks of fleshly appetites. *Lust.* John is speaking about inordinate desires that begin with simple, normal human needs, like hunger, and weariness, and the sex drive. These are normal human needs, legitimate desires. In most cases if you neglect those needs you will die. But when those desires are corrupted and perverted by sin, they become wicked appetites that destroy us.

There's nothing wrong with hunger, for example, as long as we remain in control of that desire. But when the desire controls us, normal hunger gives way to the sin of gluttony, and that is a fleshly lust.

There's nothing wrong with weariness and the desire for rest. But a person who forfeits control of that normal desire becomes lazy and slothful in a sinful way. There's nothing inherently wrong with the sex drive. Hebrews 13:5: "**Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.**" But if *it* controls *you* rather than vice versa, it gives way to all kinds of perverse desires and evil lusts. Drunkenness, and immorality, and any sin that stems from a lack of self-control is rooted in this kind of fleshly lust.

Do not love these things, John says. Do not be controlled by such lusts, for they are incompatible with true love for God.

Next he mentions:

The desires of the eyes. Here he's talking about the sin that has become the hallmark of our generation. Everywhere you look today, you are bombarded with inducements to succumb to the lust of the eyes. Our perverted society deliberately appeals to the lust of the eyes and tries to enflame this sort of lust in everyone. It's called advertising.

Turn on your television and you will be assaulted with things deliberately designed to appeal to the lust of the eyes. Get on the internet, and you face the problem multiplied

exponentially. Even if you unplug from TV and the internet, you cannot drive through Santa Clarita without facing a constant onslaught of temptations to lust with the eyes.

The lust of the eyes is primarily an appeal to sin with the imagination. If the lust of the flesh is best characterized by out-of-control bodily desires, the lust of the eyes occurs when the imagination is out of control. Jesus said, "**everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart**" (Matthew 5:28). The sin described there takes place in the imagination. But that's what John has in mind when he speaks of "**the desires of the eyes.**"

Finally, he names:

Pride in possessions. The King James Version says, "**The pride of life.**" The New American Standard Bible says, "**the boastful pride of life.**" It describes the boastful arrogance that typifies this world's rulers, the rich, the powerful, the popular people of the world. It's not *just* "**pride in possessions**" — but it's that kind of pride. People are so proud of whatever worldly advantages or material wealth they manage to attain. And even people with no material possessions cultivate pride in their reputations, pride in their athletic prowess, pride in their self-sufficiency, and sometimes even pride in their poverty. This is the tendency all fallen creatures face toward self-glorification. It speaks of pride in oneself at the expense of others. John is referring here to the tendency that makes us overly obsessed with how we look, what sort of social status we maintain, and a host of other selfish tendencies. Sinful ambition. Arrogant boasting. It's the pride that makes a boxer stand over his defeated opponent and taunt him, saying things like, "I'm the greatest," or, "I am the king of the world!" It's raw egoism, and our generation has tried to elevate it to a virtue.

But God calls it a sin, and it's a sin that breeds other sin. Pride lies at the root of most human strife, hatred, and other kinds of wars and fightings. This is the very sin that caused Satan's fall.

In fact, I want you to notice that these same three worldly tendencies were all present in the beginning, at the fall.

Listen to Genesis 3:6: "**When the woman saw that the tree was good for food** [that's an appeal to the desires of the flesh.] **and that it was a delight to the eyes**, [the desires of the eyes] **and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise** [the pride of life, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."

So these worldly pitfalls all played a role in the fall of humanity. And they continue to plague us today. Look at any magazine rack, and you'll see all those temptations on display in vivid color. The world appeals *overtly* to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Don't get me started about women's magazines. If you want to see the very definition of worldliness, there it is. I got stuck standing in a checkout line at an airport newsstand not long ago, and I was positioned right next to the women's section of the magazine wall.

It was awful. One magazine alone had articles on "How to talk so that everyone will listen" and "How to look younger and sexier" — appealing to pride. The same magazine had a lead article on "Amazing lovemaking techniques" — appealing to the lust of the flesh. And the cover, of course, was carefully designed to appeal to the lust of the eyes. I don't need to tell you that the magazines that target men are even worse. We live in a world that is completely given over to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the sinful pride of life.

This is the heart of the sin of *worldliness*. We live in a generation when almost no one is concerned about the sin of worldliness anymore. It's not a sin post-modern Christians are concerned about, in their zeal to accommodate unchurched people with a message that is seeker-sensitive and user-friendly. Postmodern Christians are determined to portray the church's mission in this world as a friendly dialogue—a *conversation*. It's not. It's warfare. And the Bible says friendship with the world is enmity with God. Worldliness is a sin.

Ask the typical Christian to define worldliness and they will talk about surface issues—smoking, drinking, dancing, and going to movies. But this verse teaches us that *real* worldliness is a heart that is in love with sensual appetites, sinful imaginations, selfish ego—pride.

Worldliness is the peculiar sin of the church in this generation, I fear, and the problem gets worse every time evangelicals fall in love with a new fad that imitates and celebrates the spirit of the age. The church is becoming as proud and as lustful as the world. And that is precisely what this verse commands us not to do.

I hope you see what a high standard this passage sets for us. We must be different from the world if we are going to reach the world for Christ. And these three sins encompass "**all that is in the world**"—everything we must put off if we are going to be conformed perfectly to the likeness Christ.

Are you aware of that in your day-to-day lives? Is your heart set on Christ so that you will not be dragged into sin by the love of this world? Remember, **"the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."**

May God give us grace to set our **"affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For [we] are dead, and [our] life is hid with Christ in God."** We need to live with the hope that **"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, [we shall] also appear with him in glory"** (Colossians 3:2-4).