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Love for the Father Opposed to Love for the World

1 John 2:15-17

Proposition: The Father's love, works, and will motivate His people to stop loving the world.

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It is possible for a Christian to stay away from questionable amusements and doubtful places and still love the world, for worldliness is a matter of the heart. (Wiersbe 2009, 71)

Anything in a Christian’s life that causes him to lose his enjoyment of the Father’s love or his desire to do the Father’s will is worldly and must be avoided. (Wiersbe 2009, 72)

Worldliness is trusting in means to do more than it is in their nature to do. Means are good, and useful, but to trust in them rather than the God who gave them is the definition of worldliness.--Greg Thurston

Worldliness is the “inordinate and immoderate setting of our mind, will, or affections upon other things, and taking them off from [God] in whole or in part.” (The Orthodox Presbyterian Church 2007, Larger Cat105)

The promises of God, in the sense we deal with here, are “his intendments and purposes, that whereof they make mention being *not the condition* whereon his purposes are suspended, but the **way** and **means whereby** the thing promised is to be accomplished.” (Owen 2011 Reprint, 319)

Owen: the promises of salvation and sanctification must be originally made to sinners, not to righteous people, or no one could become righteous!

The city of Babylon appears frequently in Scripture, where it symbolizes all that the world is and has to offer. Abraham was, in a sense, called out of Babylon, or at least Ur of the Chaldeans, who were the original Babylonians. Judah was taken into exile by Babylon, thus bringing the story of the Old Testament full circle: God called His people out of Babylon, but by the end of 2 Chronicles, which concludes the Old Testament in the Hebrew ordering of the books, they are back in Babylon. Only a few tens of thousands returned with Ezra and Nehemiah; apparently, the rest were quite happy to live in Babylon.

Yet the New Testament tells us that this is not the end of the story of Babylon. When Jesus Christ returns in power and glory, He will destroy the city of Babylon; Revelation 18 details this destruction of Babylon, and of the things present in Babylon. Indeed, John offers us a list of what was available for sale in Babylon in verses 11-14. Babylon, in biblical usage, is the world; and these items are the things in the world. Notice how they are described: they are things after which the souls of men longed. That's important. Remember it.

But stick with me here. Some of these same items were previously mentioned in the context of the last days: Isaiah 60:5,6,13,17.

Think with me. Gold, silver, precious stones and iron were bad when they were the wares of Babylon. But those same material goods--gold, silver, precious stones, and iron--are good when they are used for the glory of God. Notice with me--the Babylonian goods were things that men's souls craved. The goods mentioned by Isaiah were there to beautify the house of God and make His name glorious.

So what are the goods of this world to you? Are they the goods of Babylon, used and enjoyed for their own sakes as part of the corrupt world system? Or are they the goods of heaven, used and enjoyed for the sake of God's glory? If the world and its products are that which your soul longs for, then you have joined the system of Babylon. The word of God has a message for you this morning, and its message is this: stop loving the world, for the Father and the world are mutually exclusive. The command is quite straightforward: do not love the world. The reasons are equally clear; negatively, they are drawn from the nature of the world; positively, they are drawn from the nature of the believer. But overall, John's message is this: The Father's love, works, and will motivate His people to stop loving the world.

The Command: Love not the World, v. 15a

First John has fewer imperatives, proportionally, than any other New Testament book. Yet here is a clear imperative: "do not love the world." It is a present imperative, which means

that it has in view a situation where the subjects of the command are presently engaged in the activity. In other words, when John says “Don’t love the world” he means “Stop loving the world.” He’s telling us to cease from doing something we’re already doing.

What does it mean to love the world? In other words, what is John telling us to do when he tells us to stop loving the world? First of all, loving the world cannot be reduced to a list of activities. Certain Christian groups throughout history have tried to do this, and the results have always been unsatisfactory. Some American Christians at the beginning of the last century defined “loving the world” as dancing, going to movie theaters, smoking tobacco, and drinking alcohol. Some Egyptian Christians in the early centuries of the church considered it worldly to live in a city at all, and sought solitude in the desert where the so-called temptations of the world would not be able to reach them. The problem in each case was the same: both groups forgot that to love the world is to do anything or be inclined towards anything that diminishes your love for the Father and joy in doing His will. To love the world is to do things, think things, or feel things that are opposed to or diminish your love for the Father. As you have heard from this pulpit many times over the last year, to love the world is to trust in earthly means rather than in the God who gave the earthly means. It is this kind of trusting in means that removes your trust from the Father. In short, to love the world is to look to it for the blessings which can only come from the Father. It is the “inordinate and immoderate setting of our mind, will, or affections upon other things, and taking them off from [God] in whole or in part” (WLC 1:105 WCS).

What does the apostle mean by the term “world”? Not “all the people in the world,” for we are commanded to love one another, our neighbors, and our enemies. All of these are people in the world. Rather, the apostle at least means the corrupt world system, the “stronghold” of those who do not know God, who do not listen to God, and who do not comprehend the light which God is and which shined in Jesus Christ. Obviously, this is part of what John tells us not to love; we may not love anything which hates God and is opposed to Him. Besides, in any case, it would be stupid for us to love the world in this sense, for this is the “world” that hates us as believers and longs for nothing more than our destruction. Certainly, therefore, we are commanded not to love the corrupt world system in its hatred of God, nor its products. This includes much of what passes for “entertainment.” Do you love music with ungodly lyrics? Do you love films which glory in the violation of the sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments? Do you read books which break the third commandment and take the name of God in vain? If so, then you are guilty of loving the world. Stop loving the world! As a corrupt system, the world hates you. One commentator calls the world an image of “life where God does not rule.”

However, the “world” cannot here be limited to the wicked portion of the world. More than anything, as we saw, the love of the world is all in *how* you love the world. So those who think that loving the world means loving particular entities are wrong. It does not refer so much to the object as to the kind of love. Do you love the world with reference to God, and enjoy it because it points you to Him? Or do you love it for its own sake, without reference to Him? Christ loved the world with reference to God; He loved it for His own sake, that His glory might be furthered in redeeming sinners. What about you? In what sense do you love the world? Of course, if you use and enjoy ungodly things, you are loving the world without reference to God. But you can use and enjoy theological training, ecclesiastical position, family, spouses, children, books, music, and other things good in themselves, and do it all unlawfully, without reference to God, without using them and enjoying them for His glory. Ask yourself this: If the Lord gave me a salary of a million dollars a year, would I principally be delighted simply that I was getting such a salary? That is, would my joy be in the million dollars, or the expanded service to the Kingdom that I could perform using the million dollars? If I had such a salary and lost it, would I be content or angry?

The apostle’s command is clear: do not love the outward things of this life, in the sense of setting your heart on them and looking to them for satisfaction. Negatively, John commands us not to love the world. Positively, the same truth about the world is expressed by the Westminster Larger Catechism: “We have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life, and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them; and that neither they of themselves are able to sustain us, nor we to merit, or by our own industry to procure them.” In other words, people who worked a lot harder than I ever have starved to death. Though in the providence of God generally hard work leads to the rewards of prosperity, it does not always do so. Without the blessing of God, food will not nourish you; air will not sustain your cells; a home will not keep you warm, and a sound system will not entertain you. So brothers and sisters in Christ, why would you set your heart on them? Why would you love them? Even the good things of this life cannot satisfy, much less the wicked things. They cannot do, under their own power, the things they promise. Solomon tells us that in Ecclesiastes: God has separated acquiring and enjoying. You can acquire a spouse, but there is no guarantee that you will enjoy marriage. You can go to a gourmet restaurant and pay for it with a credit card, but there is no guarantee that you will enjoy the food or be able to digest it.

This, in brief, is what the apostle means: don’t set your heart on the world. Use it, enjoy it, but always do so keeping in mind that this world is not an end in itself; it is here to enable you to glorify and enjoy God.

To enforce this command, the apostle gives us two descriptions--one negative in character, of the world and its lusts; one positive in character, of the Christian and his character. Let us look first, then, at the apostle’s characterization of the world.

Negatively Considered: The World Described, vv. 15c-17a

Kills Love for the Father, v. 15b

The New Revised Standard Version takes the conditional clause in the second half of verse fifteen and turns it into a direct statement: “The love of the Father is not in those who love the world” (1Jo 2:15 NRSV). Is this our love for the Father, or the Father’s love for us? Clearly, it is our love for the Father. “The person who sets affection on the world cannot exercise true love for the Father” (Yarbrough, 130). After all, remember that the apostle’s purpose in writing this letter is to declare to us how to have fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. He has just written to three different groups--fathers, little children, and young men, all about their strength and their victory. It is in this context that he urges us not to love the world. This strength and this victory is the fruit of the Father’s pre-existing love. It is His love in you that enables you to love him. Yet, as even the semi-pagan Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria pointed out, it is no more possible for love for God to co-exist with love for the world than it is “for light and darkness to be present at the same time.”

If you love the world, that will not motivate God to stop loving you; the apostle is not threatening his readers like that. Rather, he is simply saying that if you love the world, your heart will drift away from God. As you have heard many times from this pulpit, worldliness will not destroy the being of your relationship with God, but it will certainly destroy its well-being. In any case, the apostle wants you to consider this: if you insist on loving the world, then that is proof positive that you do not love the Father. If you must have your ungodly entertainment and refuse to consider that it might be wicked, never mind that you ought to give it up, then you love the world and not the Father. If you have your heart set on some good thing, whether it’s finding a spouse, raising good children, getting a good job, getting good grades, keeping your financial affairs in good order, or whatnot, then you have set your heart on the things of this world, and therefore not on the Father. The Father and the world, in the sense of things to be loved, are mutually exclusive. You can have one or the other, but not both. If you seek the Kingdom, the other things will be added to you--but if you seek the other things, then you will lose the Kingdom. If you are looking for beautiful merchandise to beautify God’s beautiful house, then you can have and appreciate this world’s good. But if you are merely seeking, like Babylon, to enrich and aggrandize yourself, then you are pursuing the world, and your material goods will be destroyed.

It Is Not From the Father, v. 16

Verse fifteen gives two reasons not to love the world: first, God directly commands you not to love the world. Second, love for the world drives out love for the Father. Now, to these

reasons, he adds two more. The third reason, therefore, is the source of the wicked things in the world. These are not from the Father, and therefore you must not love them. What are these wicked things? The categories are famous. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. But what, exactly, belongs in each category? There is much debate among the commentators and other interpreters. However, we know that the apostle was trying to be clear and broad. Therefore, if some particular could belong to one of these categories, it probably does. Also, since the early church, it has been recognized that John is alluding to the three ways in which Satan tempted Eve. She “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate” (Gen 3:6 ESV). Remember, there was nothing wrong with the fruit, except that it had been forbidden. The same is true of the things in the world: many of them are good, but they have been forbidden to us because God wants to teach us to trust in Him, not in any worldly thing, however good it is. Therefore, to set your affection on worldly things, or to look to them as the ground of your boasting and source of your satisfaction, to be proud on account of them--all of that is wicked, and to do it will put in you the same place that Eve’s sin put her. So let’s look a bit more closely at the three categories of things that are not from the Father, but from the world.

The Lust of the Flesh--Unredeemed Desires

Eve saw that the tree was good for food; surely this is the lust of the flesh, where the sinful nature takes over bodily desires and perverts them into sinful lusts. Contrary to the teaching of Buddhism, there is nothing wrong with desire. The problem lies in the character of the one doing the desiring. Christ used this same word when He said, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you.” In His case, it was a righteous desire. But the desires of the flesh--that is, not of the body *per se* but of the sinful part, the part that lusts against the spirit, the part in which dwells no good thing--these desires are always corrupt and wicked. That’s why the old NIV renders this phrase as “the cravings of sinful man.” Do you have a fleshly nature? Does it desire things? The things it desires do not come from the Father. They came from Him originally, of course, but they have been perverted or misused by the world. Food is good, but if you have an eating disorder, then you desire food in the wrong way; to you, food is from the world. Pleasure is good, but if you desire it in the wrong way, in an ultimate way, then to you, it is from the world.

The Lust of the Eyes--Spiritual Blindness

The lust of the eyes is hard to absolutely distinguish from the lust of the flesh. Some suggest that “lust of the eyes” and “pride of life” both describe subsets of the “lust of the flesh.” In any case, the lust of the eyes at least refers to spiritual blindness, where the eyes mis-evaluate

what they see. Eve, for instance, saw that the forbidden fruit was pleasant to the eyes; surely this is the lust of the eyes, which in her fallen posterity manifests itself as spiritual blindness which looks on wicked things and loves them rather than being repulsed by them. Eve should have disliked even to contemplate the forbidden fruit; instead, she thought it pleasant to the eyes. Is there anything in your life which should disgust you, but which you find pleasant? Why do you have eyes? For the sake of glorifying and enjoying God--not for the sake of glorifying and enjoying yourself. If you use your eyes for sinful activities, or only to “keep an eye out” for the things you want, then you are living in the lust of the eyes. Even if you only look at and want good things, to you, they are worldly because you are looking at them in the wrong way. I once spoke with a woman who had been a near-professional thief in her teenage years. To her, everything was simply an object to steal. If she walked past a car, she was automatically checking to see if it were locked and looking for anything inside that she could take. The value or non-value of the things had nothing to do with it; for her, the mere presence of an opportunity was a good reason to steal. Now, was the car sinful? No, of course not. But to this thief, it was a temptation from the world, not a gift from the Father. If you pursue any sinful path, you will quickly become like that thief. Good things will become to you occasions of sin, not good things to be enjoyed as means of glorifying and enjoying the one who gave the good thing.

The Pride of Possessions--Material Pride

Finally, Eve saw that the tree was to be desired to make one wise. What is this but the pride of life? Whether that pride is in one’s own learning, wisdom, assets, body, possessions, or anything else that belongs to you in this world, it is a spiritual sin that makes its boast in material goods. Anything that causes you to be arrogant could probably fit under this category, though it especially describes the arrogance that bases itself on the things of this life. You know that you suffer from this spiritual disease if you love the praise of men more than the praise of God; if you are embarrassed to bring up the name of Jesus Christ in conversation with non-believers; if your Christmas letter is a litany of all the wonderful things you and your family did this year; or if you think that you deserve greater respect from people because of your GPA, your salary, your bank account, your home, your car, your vacation package, or anything else in your life. This kind of arrogance is not from the Father; it draws its strength and vitality from the world, which respects academic degrees and houses and lands. God is no respecter of persons; to Him, your GPA means nothing. Your luxury car and luxury home mean nothing. He is impressed with you solely on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Nothing else impresses Him.

The two lusts, and the pride, come from the world, not from the Father. This is the third reason not to love the world. How can you love that which comes from the great enemy of your Father? Easily, I know. Nonetheless, you must keep these truths fresh before your mind, so that you can resist the temptation to love the world. Think about what the world actually is, and

where it actually comes from. And then, reinforce your resolve with this final reason, the fourth reason, which is in verse 17.

It Is Passing Away, v. 17

This world is on its way out; its days are numbered, and its time is short. This congregation is now twelve years old. This city of Broomfield is now fifty-two years old. Time, it seems, is passing. Many philosophers and poets and pastors and partygoers have lamented this fact, and most of us act like we believe with the scoffers that “all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation” (2Peter 3:4 ESV). But family of God, the apostle John declares to you that time will not pass forever; someday, it will all run out. One commentator suggested that you could symbolize this to yourself by hanging on your wall a skull and an hourglass. Sooner or later, the world will come to an end, and the works done in it will be burned up. The heavens will be rolled up like a scroll, and the Lord will return. At that time, it will be suddenly very clear that the world was temporary all along. Do you actually think of your time here as a night’s lodging in a motel on the way to heaven? Do you believe that your home, your car, your bank account and your DVD collection will last forever? God promises that they won’t. So stop loving them, making them your all-in-all. They are doomed, and so is everyone who trusts in them.

Positively Considered: The Christian Described, vv. 15b-17

But you don’t have to trust in worldly goods, no matter how good those goods are. Though he presented four reasons not to love the world, John doesn’t leave it there. He also gives us the positive characteristics of a Christian. Christianity is not a negative vision; you don’t become a Christian by not loving the world. You become a Christian by loving the Father, loving the works of the Father, and doing the will of the Triune God.

He Loves the Father, v. 15b

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, explains St. John. In other words, it is normative for a Christian to love the Father! If you don’t love the Father, something is wrong with you. After all, consider how He loved you. John wrote in his gospel that God loved the world *in this way*: He gave His only begotten son, so that whoever believes in Him should have eternal life. Can you love the Father who loved you like this? Remember, the world hates you. The Father loves you. On which one will you set your hope? Which one will you love back? The Father loved you when you hated him. He sacrificed His most precious possession, His Son, on your behalf.

To have the love of the Father in you means that you recognize what He has done for you; you adore His kindness, His glory, His compassion, His saving love. Your heart is fixed and settled entirely on Him. Remember, love is the property most particularly ascribed to the Father: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2Corinthians 13:14 ESV). Abide in His love.

He Loves the Works of the Father, v. 16

Not only does a true Christian love the Father; he loves things that are from the Father, and not from the world. That is, he loves everything that is the opposite of the three things that are from the world.

Contentment of the Flesh in Pursuing Redeemed Desires, Ephesians 2:3; 1 Peter 4:2

The true believer does not dwell in the lust of the flesh, but finds contentment for the flesh in pursuing redeemed desires. Paul describes us in our sinful condition: “among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Ephesians 2:3). But God saved us--why? “So as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God,” as 1 Peter 4:2 expresses it. Contentment can never be found in the lust of the flesh; lust is, by definition, a craving which cannot be satisfied by what this earth has to offer. But to live for the will of God, to walk on this earth for the sake of His glory and not your own--this is true contentment. This is what Christianity offers. You don't have to live with wicked desires; you can have true peace in doing, and living for, the will of God.

Satisfaction of the Eyes in Beholding God, Psalm 17:15

More than that, however, you can escape from the lust of the eyes by fixing your sight on the glory of God. At the end of Psalm 17, David explicitly contrasts the destinies of the righteous and the wicked. He speaks of “men of the world whose portion is in this life. You fill their womb with treasure; they are satisfied with children, and they leave their abundance to their infants. As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness” (Psalm 17:14-15).

Even if you have only participated in the lust of the eyes one time, you know that it does not and cannot satisfy. You can have the world if you want; you can take your portion in this life. But you won't be satisfied with it. You were created to behold the face of God in light and joy,

and if you aren't doing that, you will never be satisfied. Can't you pursue Jesus Christ? Won't you seek satisfaction in Him? The world is not to be loved. It excludes love for the Father. It's not from the Father. And it is passing away. One thing is certain: the world will disappoint you, but whoever waits for God will never be put to shame.

Joy in Accurate Self-Estimation, Philippians 2:3

Finally, the true Christian is marked by joy. The worldly person, who lives in the pride of life, will be miserable and grouchy, because he has an image and a reputation to sustain. There is no joy in pride. Pride cannot be impressed, cannot laugh, cannot enjoy; so long as you live in the pride of life, you will be unable to humbly appreciate God's gifts. But the Christian alternative to this wretched pride is clear: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:3-5). Humility and joy are coordinate virtues. Pride is stuck on itself; humility is not impressed with itself, but with others, and especially with the Father.

He Does the Will of the Triune God, v. 17

Finally, the apostle concludes his statements about love for the world with a direct contrast: the world is passing away, but the one who does the will of God abides forever. The Christian, then, is the one who loves the Father, who loves the works of the Father, and who does the will of the Triune God. To know God's will, you must read His word. You ought to memorize the Ten Commandments. Then, knowing His will, you must do it. You must stop loving the world. You must have no other gods. The world and its lusts are passing away, and the one who pursues the world and its lusts will also pass away.

Christ commanded His disciples to abide in His love. The way to do that is to keep His commandments. The way to keep His commandments is to learn them, pray and beg God for help, and then do them.

You are a Christian. You have a Father who loves you. So stop loving the world; stop setting your heart on the things in the world. Obey God's commands; love the Father; love His salvific work; and you will abide forever. Amen.

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About the Preacher

Caleb Nelson preached this sermon on December 29, 2013. Caleb is a student at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary