

Loving the World

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Bible Text: 1 John 2:15-17

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Let's all turn together to 1 John 2 on this Sunday night and we'll talk about loving the world and I hope that you gain insights here that are encouraging and strengthening to you as we talk about this together. Look at 1 John 2, if you will, verses 15-17. The apostle called the apostle of love, John, has been greatly exhorting, if you will, in this letter on Christians and Christian love and how we are now ones who have changed hearts by the regenerating power of God and these changed hearts are hearts with a new love in them. "The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit," the Apostle Paul wrote and so John has gone into great lengths to elaborate on and elucidate, if you will, on the glories and the wonders and the realities of Christian love for God and for each other. We have a love for each other that even exceeds our love for our own spouses and children if they were not Christian. That doesn't mean that if a Christian happens to have an unsaved spouse or child they don't deeply love them, certainly they do, as a matter of fact, they can love them better than anyone. But our love as brothers and sisters in Christ transcends this world and this age where when you get in heaven, you will not have brothers and sisters and moms and dads in heaven, we'll all just be brothers and sisters in Christ. It's a rich and amazing thing God does when he binds us in this eternal family called the family of God.

Now, he gives the converse of that since we have a new love for God and love for other Christians and I always feel like I need to give an addendum here because I remember my own struggle as an early Christian wondering why I didn't have this pulsating love for other believers I met and I'm convinced part of that was my own immaturity but I'm convinced a lot of that was because a whole lot of people in the churches where I was at that time, not here but churches I was in, had a lot of church members who were not Christians and as I got to know them, we just didn't fit. There just didn't seem to be a spiritual oneness. You loved them but it's like something wrong's here. Then I had the great privilege of coming here and growing with you for 33 years now and I know what this verse means when it talks about, or the verses rather John talks about where he talks about the great love we have and the beauty of that love and the wonder of that love and I love you and I mean that and it's really special and it's not a superficial love and it's not a worldly love. It's a deep spiritual love and only growing Christians experience that. Do you know how many churches exist out there with such immaturity in the body that they never enjoy the spiritual love God meant for them to enjoy? And they don't know what they don't have. You can't talk to them about it because they've never been around it so

they don't know what they're missing. I remember John MacArthur writing, because he's been at his church for 40+ years and he's something of a mentor to us and he said some years back, "You know, I finally know what a mature church family looks like and feels like," and that's kind of the way I feel to some degree. Certainly not that we've arrived but I enjoy the spiritual maturity and oneness in love that we have.

In converse to that spiritual love, here's what John says in 1 John 2:15-17, "Do not love the world." If we do love God and Christians uniquely and wonderfully because we've been changed, we will also be those who,

"15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

I remember for so many years as a young Christian I would read a verse like that and I thought, "Oh my goodness, if I enjoy a steak dinner I'm loving the world. If I enjoy playing with my dog, my dog is part of the world, I love the world and I'm a sinner. If I enjoy going on a fishing trip, the lake and the fish and the boat, well, those are things that come out of the world so I must be loving the world," and had a terrible guilt complex and I constantly found myself if I did something fun in the world and caught myself enjoying it, then I had to come and do penance, you know, had to come and find some spiritual activity to balance it all out in some way, shape or fashion. But that's not what the Lord's talking about here. A few thoughts hit my mind meditating on this. You remember the Lord Jesus went to the home of the very wealthy Matthew, the tax collector, and he ate a wondrous, gourmet I'm sure, banquet meal and enjoyed it with a bunch of sinners and the Lord made use of the blessings of this present world and he didn't love the world. He also ate in the home of Zacchaeus and Zacchaeus was a very wealthy, again, tax gatherer and had many sinners, I'm sure. But he enjoyed those things while he was there. Remember Jesus getting in the boat with Peter and telling Peter to put the net on the other side again and Peter said, "We've done this all night long, Lord, it won't work," and finally Peter relents and he puts the net in the water and the Bible says there were so many fish that the boat almost sank. Now, the earth-loving environmentalist, earth-worshiping environmentalist of our day would probably just say, "Well, that was sinful and wasteful. You should only use what natural resources you actually need," but the Lord gave them more than enough fish. So he seemed to enjoy for that moment giving them an abundance of blessing out of the material earth. I remember the lady that came in and anointed Jesus' feet with very costly perfume. Remember the one who had a problem with that? The spiritual acting one, Judas Iscariot said, "We could have used that and helped a lot of poor people," and Jesus said, "The poor you've got with you always. She lavished a very expensive thing upon me because she loves me and she's worshipping me," and we don't see the Lord correctly these "excesses" or these extravagances in the world.

Now, certainly as a child of God, we want to be balanced; we want to be prudent; we want to be good stewards. I'm not suggesting that but a lot of the simplistic knee-jerk reactions to what is and is not worldliness simply don't hold up biblically. Did you hear that? A lot of the first impressions in your mind simply don't correspond with Scripture. I've told you this many times before but a big part of my spiritual pilgrimage is repenting of areas where I was more conservative than God. Have you ever been there? You are more strict than God on something and you had to loosen up a little bit and realize your position was firmer than God meant for your position to be. Again, among brothers and sisters we can have varying positions and varying convictions about varying things, we just don't need to judge the other person who's not as strict as we are unless the Scriptures clearly say it.

Let's talk about this loving the world and maybe get a better grasp on what John means here, what the word of God is saying. First of all, let's define it; the definition of loving the world. He says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world." The word "love" here is the same word John has been using for other forms of love like Christian's loving one another. He says, "Don't have that kind of love for the world." What it means is a close attachment to; an intimate fellowship with; or a loyal devotion to this world. Now, I'm sure that it happened that some of the believers John is writing to as it happens to believers in every age, had not walked as discreetly in this area as they ought to and it switched something of allegiance and they're giving more attention to the things of the world than they were the things of God but, however, the word "world" here doesn't mean the world of nature. It doesn't mean that you can't enjoy the things that God has made and put in this world that we might call nature. 1 Timothy speaks of how he gave us all things richly to enjoy. It doesn't mean humanity. I mean, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," and there is a sense that we do love the people of the world but the word "world" here has the idea of "to order" or "to arrange." It means we're not to love the way this world is now ordered. We're not to love the way this world now functions and you could go on and elaborate to say we don't have this godless world's priorities, we don't carry in our heart this godless world's affections or perspectives or their principles or their ideals. Ours are now to be higher than the low, fallen, God-hating and sinful world we are in. Some theologians use the phrase "this world system" that is anti-God and godless; we're not to love it. I like the phrase man-centered. Everything in the world today is so man-centered: it's not about God and God's glory. Men today do not look at the world the way they looked at it 150 years ago when even unchurched men 150 years ago would talk about providence and that God is the center and everything is happening to the end of the orders of divine providence. But today it's like if God is mentioned, man is the center and God's just part of his life. It puts man at the center of the universe and God is just one of the components. That's blasphemy.

So that's the way this world system thinks. That's the way this world system functions. This world system, the Bible says, has a temporary ruler and the temporary ruler is Satan. The Scripture says he is god of this world, 2 Corinthians 4:4. The Bible speaks of the children of this world: that would be all non-Christians, Luke 16:8. The Bible speaks of the spirit of this world, 1 Corinthians 2:6, that indeed is the spirit of the antichrist that is working. The Bible even speaks of the wisdom of this world and we could go on and on

and on. As a matter of fact, let me go over to John 15 and just read you a cross-reference here. John 15:19, "If you were of the world," in other words, if that was your primary place of belonging. By the way, we need to get back to that word "belonging" when we talk about the church family. A church should be a place you belong, not a place you attend. You can't really attend a church. You can attend a meeting a church is having but you can't attend church. You belong to church. It's the totality of your being that you are interconnected by God with a group of other people who have been born-again by the Spirit of God and have the gospel of Jesus Christ and God placed you in that fellowship and now you belong there. It's a permanent, deeper than physical aspect relationship, a spiritual relationship. So, with that in mind, he says, "Now you're not one who belongs in the world anymore. That's not your primary source of reference or orientation so you're not of the world. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world," I love this, "but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you." You, in a sense, have a hatred for this world system that is man-centered and God-less, praises and enjoys things God would call wickedness, that's the spirit of this world. He said, "But also because I chose you, you now belong to my church." By the way, if there is a true, Spirit-filled, Bible-based, Christ-honoring, theologically sound, functioning church, folks aren't going to come into that church if God doesn't choose them and place them there. You do understand flesh doesn't like true churches.

So he said, "I chose you out of the world to be a part of my called out ones, therefore, that's not who you are anymore. Those worldlings hate you and you hate what they're about though you love them as fellow human beings that you would like to reach with the gospel." I read this somewhere: a church nominating committee was meeting and the pastor suggested a name for consideration on this committee but one of the deacons of the church stood up and said, "I wouldn't recommend him for the committee, he's a thermometer instead of a thermostat." He lets his surroundings regulate himself instead of being a good positive influence for God. He seems to be spiritual when he's around Christians but when he's at work, he joins in with the ungodly and makes no impact for Christ. Well, that's a person who really is acting like he still belongs in the world and not one that has been chosen and called out by God. This is a sad commentary of far too many professing Christians today.

Let me just read this verse in John 17. I don't want to spend too much time in cross-references or I'll never get through with my text. John 17, in Jesus' high priestly prayer. Jesus is about to yield himself up to the arresting mob of the Sanhedrin guard and he's going to go to the cross but before that, we have this beautiful prayer, this prayer he is praying as the high priest for all of his children and he says in this prayer in John 17:15, "I do not ask," and he's praying to the Father, "You to take them out of the world." Okay, the world is of the antichrist; the world has an antichrist spirit; the world is man-centered; the world is ungodly but Jesus said, "Don't take them out of the world. Don't take us out of the world at least not yet." "But to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world," that's not their primary source of orientation or belonging anymore, "even as I am not of the world," he says. Then he says, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." So, we're not going to leave the world but we have been changed in our hearts so that we

do not any longer think like man-centered worldlings think. As a matter of fact, we abhor those who would look at the earth and look at the pleasures God has ordained in the earth and look at the wealth of resources God has given us in the world. We deplore and hate the concept that people would make use of that and have no thought of God. We hate that concept; we hate that viewpoint; we hate that God-forgetting spirit that is out there.

Scripture says that love for God and love for the world system, not that you are loving a steak dinner or loving a trip to the lake, that's a figure of speech and I use the word "love" very loosely there, of course. It's kind of interesting that we love asparagus and we love our wives. We do use that word very broadly, don't we? I think you understand I'm just using one word instead of trying to use several different ones but we can enjoy these things in the world very much and know at the same time that God gave them to us and we give him glory for them but that's not loving the world. We despise the concept that somebody would look at a steak dinner and enjoy it and say, "Wow, God-less evolution supplied me something wonderful today." They may not actually say that but that's the spirit of this age.

C. H. Spurgeon, talking about how it's impossible for a true believer to love the world says this, "If I had a brother who had been murdered, what would you think of me if I daily consorted with the assassin who drove the dagger into my brother's heart? Surely, I too must be an accomplice in the crime. Sin murdered Christ and will you be a friend to the sin and to this world? Sin pierced the heart of the Incarnate God. Can you love it?" That's a pointed illustration.

The definition of love is a close attachment, a loyal devotion, a heart-intimacy with the philosophies and the viewpoints of a man-centered and God-rejecting system that is this world. Now let's go to on: I. Not only the definition of loving the world but, II. The description of loving and we see that in 1 John 2:16. He says, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh," he's getting quite specific, not totally exhaustive but giving some ideas of what it's like when the love of the world rules your heart. "The lusts of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." Now, the things that he lists here are not from the Father, that means they are from Satan. It's kind of like James, I think, who said, "This wisdom is earthly and demonic." There are two basic realms of wisdom: there's godly wisdom and there's fallen or demonic and earthly wisdom.

In verse 16, he gives this list and he talks first of all about the lust of the flesh. Now, what is that talking about? That's not a new concept; that's not a new phrase but what does he mean when he says "the lust of the flesh"? I think basically the idea is this: it's when we satisfy a God-given desire in an ungodly way. That's the lust of the flesh that he's talking about. Satisfying something that God put in us but doing it with no regard to the way God said those desires are to be righteously satisfied. Now, what do we see in the world? We see the world saying it doesn't matter what the Bible says. We see the world say it doesn't matter what the morals of conservative biblical Christianity teach. If a man has a lust, he ought to enjoy it and thus we have all the promotions of all the wickednesses in our land today. I mean, folks, we have gone from maybe a begrudging allowance of things in our

land to something of a toleration to now if you don't actually celebrate the wickedness that men want to be involved in, you're somehow a bigot, an intolerant and you're the bad one.

So, lust of the flesh, it could be anything: a food. If you are approaching your diet in a way that is completely void of thanking God for it, having a God-centered view of it, rejoicing in his goodness to you for it. All the pleasures the world contains: certainly sexuality is the one that comes to mind because it's the one that's paraded and celebrated so much. God gave sexuality. It is a good God-given desire. Thank God for the God-given hormones and desires he gives young people but God has given the biblical guidelines for the satisfaction of that God-given desire. The lust of the flesh says forget what God says. Now, even though a child of God may struggle with the temptations to satisfy a sexual desire in an unbiblical way, he is convicted about it and he is troubled about it and he certainly can't rejoice in it. Amen? You see, that's the different spirit you have. The world and the world's spirit just explains away and excuses and dismisses any biblical values about fulfilling these desires. So when you involve yourself or when someone who is not of God involves himself in what is called here the lust of the flesh, they take a good God-given thing and they make it a dirty, ugly, sinful, shameful thing.

Secondly, the lust of the eyes. He said that these things are in the world and they ought not to be ruling and reigning in our lives and the second one, the lust of the eyes. These are things we desire because they look good to our eyes. Our eyes can have an appetite and we see things and we desire them. You know, the phrase is: feast your eyes on this because there's an appetite to the eyes. I think this has more the idea of the mind than just actually the physical eye organ because it's talking about how we might want to look upon amusements, entertainments, recreations. We look upon them and they look so desirable, maybe even objects of great desire and we decide that the only goal in our life, the only approach in our life is we want that for our pleasure and we leave God out of the equation totally. He says that's a worldling, that's not to be your spirit any longer.

Then he says the boastful pride of life. The boastful pride of life. Basically, I think that's the person who glories in their deeds or their possessions and, again, leaves God out of the equation. Remember, it was Jesus who allowed the expensive perfume to be put on his feet; it was Jesus who filled Peter's boat up with more than enough so we're not just talking about God maybe blessing someone with an abundance but we're talking about the heart attitude behind it and losing God in it. I jotted down three thoughts here I meditate on. If the worldly people are caught up in a worldly lust of the flesh, in a worldly lust of the eyes and in a worldly boastful pride of life, then how do we take the same things and how do we enjoy them and it's not sinful? Here are some thoughts: 1. First of all, we're not loving them, we're enjoying them. There's a great difference. We're not loving these things but we can enjoy them but we enjoy them as coming from God so there is a God-ward gratitude as we enjoy things in the world God has given us in what you call, common grace. We enjoy them with a God-ward gratitude. Why do we say thanks before we have a meal? We want to remind ourselves that God gives us everything and we want to have a God-ward gratitude about them.

Secondly, we enjoy them with godly guidance. In other words, we make sure we look at the word of God and make sure the word of God doesn't give clear prohibitions or clear guidelines on how to enjoy these things. This covers the totality of our lives. I mean, our lives are a continuum of saying, "What saith the Scripture?" Not using the Scripture in the most narrow and unbalanced and out of context interpretation so that we can all dress like Little House on the Prairie and raise our own chickens, alright? It's okay if a person wants to do that but they cannot parade around town as if they're more spiritual than the rest of us. That was just their personal conviction because Scripture doesn't say that so be careful with 1,001 rules, guidelines, limits and restrictions that you may feel comfortable with but you cannot give a concrete and exhaustive biblical position on them.

In other words, godly guidance for how we enjoy the things in the world and I think basically, folks, if the Scriptures are not violating it, God says enjoy it if you can enjoy it with real gratitude in your heart for it. There are times when some of you need to loosen up, chill out, enjoy grace a little bit. I'll go home and look in the mirror and I'll do the same thing to myself, alright? Okay, a godly gratitude, a God-ward gratitude that he's given us these things to enjoy, godly guidance in the way we enjoy them and then a God-ward praise for his power and wisdom to have given them to start with. I think those are good guidelines because you know what I've found? The moment I bring God into the center of anything I'm enjoying, I know right away if my heart is not right. I know right away and often I don't need to change anything about what I'm doing, I just need to change the way I'm thinking about what I'm enjoying. Amen? I get God back in the center of it again.

I'm getting old. I don't know that this is a very spiritual thing to mention on Sunday but I watched a hunting show this afternoon and they had these young guys, big, strong, strapping studs, young guys, rough-looking guys, muscles, hunting. I thought if I was on a hunting show, they'd have to call it "Old Men Hunting" because my arthritis hurts, my back hurts, I can't do what I used to do and I'm just not the man I used to be. That brings me to what I was about to tell you and that is: I'm thinking that there will probably be a day when I can't work full-time in the ministry. I don't plan on quitting; I don't plan on retiring but there will probably be a day when I need to support myself. I've shared this with you before but how do you do that because we ordained ministers are self-employed, there is no Baptist pension fund like there is for the Methodist Church. They have a pension fund and if you work so many years, you get so much money, kind of like the education system does. So, you're generous and gracious to help us put money in a retirement, at least you all were but that one year where you backslid and didn't do it but other than that one year, you've done real good. So, we've got to kind of manage that and if I don't put it back and I don't manage it right then, you know, Pam goes on food stamps and we starve to death somewhere but I don't know how to do that. Do you know how much money it takes for one school teacher with a master's degree to be supportive for 25 years after retirement at the level they're supported with the benefits they get? It's in the millions. I'm in nowhere close to having that kind of retirement plan. Not even close, but I struggle with that and I have had to make myself look at that and say, "God, we're going to put back some, we're going to try to invest some, we're going to try to have a good decent retirement account but I'm just going to have to put you in the middle of it and

make sure that I'm not acting like a worldling and thinking about my retirement." Let me ask you: would any of you have a problem with me retiring at the same level as a school teacher with a master's degree? I don't think anybody would have a problem with that but, man, I kind of wish the state would take in and take over preacher's retirements. You know, it would just be easier and then say, "Okay, we're going to bing, bing, bing, and when you get to 65, you get bing, bing, bing." It's over but it's all on my plate, so to speak, and it's a challenging thing. It's just one of the areas in my life where I catch myself thinking like a worldling. Like every other person in the world, I've got to make plans. It's not spiritual for me to get old and not have taken care of myself and my wife. That's not spiritual but you can sure get worldly in worrying about it.

So that's where I am, where are you? Where is the issue that you find yourself crossing over out of God-centered spiritual thinking into thinking like a worldly person thinks and getting it back on track? I think the key is, let's say I put \$1,000 a month back into a retirement account but I must put that \$1,000 a month into that retirement account trusting God to provide for me in retirement, trusting God to be my joy, not my account balance. Now, a worldly man puts \$1,000 a month, same thing, but his attitude is totally different. I mean, his hope is in making 8% a year. I mean, that's his whole hope but I have got a great back-drop. If mine doesn't work, I'm moving in with you. I preached to you faithfully all these years, save me a room in your house.

Anyway, that's just from where I am and where I'm tempted but the thing, I think, John wants to get across here is this: as a child of God, you are capable of falling back into your old unredeemed flesh in your thinking and begin to think and function just like as if you were not born-again, like a worldling. I found this years ago, it's just some wild ducks were taking their annual northward journey when suddenly a flock of tame ducks came into view below in a barnyard. Leaving his winged friends in flight, one of the ducks landed and mingled for a short time with those tame ducks on the ground. After eating some of their corn, he flew away. Soon he returned, however, this time he remained somewhat longer. The safety of the farm and the plentiful supply of food were so appealing that he lived among the domestic flock all summer long and when autumn came, he heard the cries of his former wild companions flying over as they headed southward. He felt a strong desire to join them but, well, he'd added a lot of weight from eating so much corn and hadn't been flying very much so he settled down and stayed there all winter. In the spring, he again heard the familiar call of the migrating flock above. His eyes gleamed and he began to flap his wings a little but made no real effort to fly. That fall, the sound of the wild ducks only caused him to raise his head and from then on, he paid no attention at all. That's what John doesn't want to happen to you, is to get settled and comfortable and let your thinking degenerate down to as if you were one that still belonged in the world. Jerk yourself back out of it, stir yourself from that position and lock yourself back into a God-centered perspective on who you are and how you're supposed to think and that you can enjoy the things in the world that are not biblically prohibited but you enjoy them with a God-centered perspective.

Well, real quickly, the demise of loving the world. Verse 17, "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." Here he's saying

this: God is just saying don't hurt yourself. If you sell out to something that's passing away, it has no lasting value, you're greatly damaging yourself. Now, the world is physical and its system that's functioning in this physical world is based on the lust of man for himself and his own pleasures and it's not God-centered at all. One anthropologist and historian noted, now listen to this, 19 world civilizations, that means 19 civilizations that at one point in history dominated most of the known world. That's significant now. We're not talking about Cyprus, that's one little bitty island. We're talking about basically dominating the whole inhabited world in their time. 19 world civilizations in the past have now slipped into oblivion. It's not that they declined, they're no more. They're gone. The Babylonians, go down the list. The Hittites, I mean, whoever they are that one time were major world powers, they no longer exist.

The person who passes up Jesus to stay in the lust of this world and living for the principles and values of this world will find in this life that they reap a harvest of insecurity and instability. You see, you have insecurity anytime you're trusting in anything that can be taken away from you. Did you hear that? You have insecurity anytime you're trusting in anything that can be taken away from you. Why do you think in America today we have this burgeoning entitlement mentality? Why is that? It's spiritual at its core. Why do we have an increasing number, now roughly 50% of our population, who in one degree or another look for a government entitlement or benefit to sustain them in life? I'll tell you why: because we're not God-centered as much as we used to be. There's not an anchor to God and people want something outside of themselves that seems strong and mighty and invincible to look to and there's a great host of people in our country who just feel like, "Well, the government's going to be there and they can take other people's money and give it to me and I'm going to be okay." But what they find out is, the bad thing with these socialists and communist concepts is pretty soon the government runs out of other people's money and you thought, since it was so mighty and big and trustworthy that it's just going to be there and pretty soon you end up being like Cyprus or Greece or what's going to happen in Italy and other countries who went down this road of shifting from being a God-centered people who taught individualism and individuals look to God, to being a God-less people who no longer look to God but now look to government to be their security and all it does is breed a weak nation. Weak nation. Well, insecurity and also, of course, instability. If you love this world and base your life on this world, it is a foundation that is not enduring. It is a foundation that will not stand the test of time.

Now, let me just summarize with these thoughts and we'll be through. We can and we do enjoy the common grace gifts that we find in the world but for us, they are not the end. They are gifts from our God to us but they are not to be compared with the joy we have in him. You know you're maturing as a Christian when you find yourself enjoying the grace gifts of this world but you find yourself saying to yourself, "But they do not compare to the joy I find in Christ." As the old song says, "The things of this earth grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace." Now, our flesh, and by flesh here I do not mean our sinful flesh but just our natural bodies, enjoy the pleasures that God allows but we love God first and we love God most so we enjoy many of the things that world lovers also enjoy but we do enjoy them in a totally different way, we enjoy them in a God-

centered way. Our eyes and our minds enjoy pleasing entertaining things but they enjoy them differently from the world lovers because we enjoy them in a God-centered way. We find some joy in things like accomplishments and material items that we may have worked for and achieved and gained and purchased, whatever it may be. But we find a joy differently than world lovers have in these things because we love the God who gave us the ability to achieve the accomplishments more and the one who enabled us to possess these material things because our enjoyments of accomplishments is a God-centered enjoyment.

John says “don't love the world,” but I think though it's not actually in this specific text, I think the truth is in the Scripture and certainly in all of the epistle, that is: we don't love the world the way world lovers love the world but we can enjoy the world and the things in the world because God gave them to us and we want to honor him in them and in the enjoyment of them.

Let's pray together. Let's all stand.