

“The Fight, part 1” (1 John 2:15-17) Sandy Young, BCF 2010.05.02

In the Anglican tradition from the 1600s, this is one of the questions asked at baptism: “Dost thou renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the sinful desires of the flesh, so that thou wilt not follow, nor be led by them ?” *Answer.* “I renounce them all.”

This statement is applicable not only for the new Christian, but for every following day of the Christian life. A believer needs to know early on that he or she is in for a fight. We live in the midst of a conflict of kingdoms, of an old age and an new age to come. When I first became a Christian, I was most aware of the love and forgiveness of God. But not long after, however, I felt and experienced conflict, both within and without: loss of friendships (and hurts, as friends thought I was crazy); people with false teachings were soon knocking on my door; I felt the pull of my old life calling me back with strong temptations. I began to experience what I experience down to this day, that my love for God will continually be challenged by competing loves for other things. Many of you too know what it is like to struggle with old doubts, old fears, old habits. Daily, we have some hard choices to make.

“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. 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. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:12-17 ESV)

In this passage we are given: 1) a commandment, 2) a statement, 3) a reason, and 4) a promise.

1) A commandment: do not love the world. (Verse 15a)

We understand that in the bible the “the world” can be used in different ways. Sometimes it is used for this planet, or the people upon it (as in “God so loved the world”), but it can be used of the fallen state of humanity and its corrupted values, ways, opinions, and institutions. The bible also speaks of “this present [evil] age” and “the age to come.”

In human culture there are good things: (**Romans 2:14-15**) “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires... They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts...” (there is such thing as a conscience). **Romans 12:17** “...give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.” There is much common grace (and restraint of evil) around us. The human race we are not as evil as we could be.

But Jesus said to Pilate: **John 18:36** “*My kingdom is not of this world...*” And to his disciples he said: **John 15:19** “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” And **1 John 5:19** “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”

This means most of that which presses upon us from people around us -- their opinions, loves, traditions, judgments, habits, philosophies and institutions -- have as their guiding force, not the glory of God, but only the glory of humanity or of false gods, and thus are

ultimately idolatrous. This does not mean we are to be hateful to people who are not Christians, but it means we do not love the ways of the fallen world.

Chuck Swindoll notes: The world system is committed to at least four major objectives -- **fortune, fame, power, pleasure...** “The world system is committed to at least four major objectives, which I can summarize in four words: fortune, fame, power, pleasure. First and foremost: Fortune, money. The world system is driven by money; it feeds on materialism. Second: Fame. That is another word for popularity. Fame is the longing to be known, to be somebody in someone else’s eyes. Third: Power. This is having influence, maintaining control over individuals or groups or companies or whatever. It is the desire to manipulate and maneuver others to do something for one’s own benefit. Fourth: Pleasure. At its basic level, pleasure has to do with fulfilling one’s sensual desires. It’s the same mindset that’s behind the slogan: ‘If it feels good, do it.’” (Charles Swindoll, Living Above the Level of Mediocrity, p.219.)

Satan is behind this deception and humanity is actually in bondage because of this. Bondage to their lusts, their coveting, their fears, their anger, their ways of thinking. This is called darkness and conversion to Christ is when we come out of that...

Acts 26:17-18 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles--to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Colossians 1:13-14 ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

2) A statement: We cannot love both God and the world. (Verse 15b)

These loves are mutually exclusive. There was a girl in middle school I was interested in & through intermediary friends I was told she like me 49%, another guy 51%... I really don’t think that was the correct percentages! I think she was keeping her options open.

There are really, ultimately, only two loves. The love of God, or the love of things other than God. We may enjoy things in God, as legitimate pleasures: **Ecclesiastes 3:13** *everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil--this is God's gift to man.* But in the bible love includes our highest allegiance and loyalty. We may have legitimate likes and things enjoyable to us, but our love for God is to be 100%. Here’s the difference between merely religious people and true Christians: Some people use God so that they might love and enjoy the world; Christians use the world so that they might love and enjoy God.

Paul writes: (**Galatians 6:14**) *“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* **Thomas Watson**: *“He that is in love with the world will be out of love with the cross.”*

The Israelites were called to destroy the altars of false gods within their lands: (**Judges 2:1-3**) *“I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed*

my voice. What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you."

And this is in the NT, as well. 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."*

Quote. "The followers of Jesus are to be different – different from both the nominal church and the secular world, different from both the religious and the irreligious. The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the New Testament of the Christian value-system, ethical standard, religious devotion, attitude to money, ambition, life-style and network of relationships – all of which are totally at variance with those of the non-Christian world. And this Christian Counterculture is the life of the kingdom of God, a fully human life indeed but lived out under the divine rule." (John Stott)

Appetites that are indulged tend to grow. The more I meditate on God and feed on his word in faith, the more I love him and the less I am impressed with the things in this world that many seem taken up with. But the more I indulge the pleasures of the world the less my love to God grows.

3) A reason: the nature of love for the world. (Verse 16)

The reason that these two loves are incompatible is because they are from a different source and have as their object of affection very different values. What the love of the world entails is three things ... lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and boastful pride. *Lust* is a strong desire, usually in the bad sense of a sinful craving, which is either a desire for something bad, or a overly-strong desire for something good. Even good things can become idols. The love of the world is characterized by three things:

"Lust of the flesh". "Flesh" can mean skin and muscle, or humanity (as Jesus came in the flesh), but this word is also used to designate the fallen-ness still within us, indwelling sin, the sinful nature, and so sometimes is translated "sinful nature". Paul said (Romans 7:24) "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" And believers down to this day also testify to the presence of a principle of sin within us. Skillet sings, "The secret side of me, I never let you see / I keep it caged but I can't control it... I feel it deep within, it's just beneath the skin / I must confess that I feel like a monster."

It's important for us to put this negative statement in contrast with the wonderful, positive plan of God for us. The desire of the Spirit indwelling us is to manifest "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Gal 5:16ff). What God desires for us is the fruit of the Spirit rather than the destructive deeds of the sinful nature. We combat lust with self-denial (reckoning ourselves dead to sin, putting to death/saying no to ungodly passions) and by being filled and led by the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, the "lust of the eyes" is letting the things of the world, however beautiful they might be, to lead us to turn away from God. This is especially applicable when it comes to entertainment, music, movies, and other media. We cannot take the things God hates and make them our entertainment! "Sin murdered Christ; will you be a friend to it? Sin pierced the heart of the Incarnate God; can you love it?" (C. H. Spurgeon)

Contrast this with God's will: **Philippians 4:8** *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* And **Psalms 101:2-3** *I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless.*

Thirdly, there is the boastful "pride of life" (or, in our possessions). This is the condition of pride or arrogance, with the implication of complete lack of basis for such an attitude. It is an empty and pretentious conceit. "Life" refers to our material life, such as strength, livelihood (career), possessions & wealth. It is a self-confidence in one's self-achievement, power and possessions. But God's will for us is: contentment, humility, modesty, enjoyment of what he provides, and joy which comes from God himself. The Lord always has a better plan for us!

We must live in the world. God has never commanded us to go out of it, to live in isolation in a monastery somewhere. Worldliness is a matter of getting "the world" out of us. God has given us a heavenly, spiritual life support system. We have the Holy Spirit, the word of God, prayer, and God's community, the church. Illus., when I took Scuba diving training. The final involved diving down and put on gear underwater. I was aware of water permeating everything and that I was an air-breather. The tank provided the oxygen from my world to enable me to live and move in the water world.

One of the most important components to succeeding in the fight is renewing the mind with the truth of God's word: **Romans 12:2** *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

These three negative dynamics -- eyes, flesh and pride -- remind us of Genesis 3:1ff and what went wrong after the creation of humankind. Adam was absent or uninvolved (playing video game?); Eve was deceived (reasoned with the serpent rather than exercising dominion); they doubted the goodness of God and the goodness of his plan; they looked upon and pondered that which was out of bounds; they yielded to physical desire and to pride. What they should have done at the first: kill the talking snake.

How Jesus made it right: He too was a representative for an entire race. He was present not absent. He was not deceived by Satan's lies. He believed the goodness of the Father and he lived with the boundaries set by his Father. He resisted all temptation and used God's word to establish truth. He destroyed the serpent by the Cross and resurrection. He succeeded where Adam and Eve failed. And so he has begun a new world, a new age.

Fourth, a promise: the world passes away, God's people live forever. (Verse 17)

This world-kingdom is coming down. It began by Christ's death, which nullified Satan's claim, and Christ's resurrection which is the beginning of a new creation. Now the hidden kingdom of God is advancing by the proclamation of the gospel and people are entering God's family. But one day Christ will return and the old order, the old age, the world as we know it will be finished.

Our love to God is shown by doing his will. We are very concerned to know that God loves us, but are we equally concerned that we love God and demonstrate that love.

And so we will live forever. Here are two more promises:

John 16:33 *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*"

1 John 5:4 *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.*

Some final applications.

Make sure you understand the gospel. That freely in grace God calls you to himself and to his kingdom and household. You are no longer a part of the old world system, but now are delivered, and called to a supreme love, the highest allegiance to God the Father. This position was won for you through the redemption of his Son, and applied to you by the power of his Holy Spirit. This is what it means to be a Christian.

Ask yourself, how am I different from the mass of people around me? Do I live like I belong to another Kingdom? Am I in fact doing the will of God? Am I living by Kingdom values rather than worldly values?

You who are younger: there will be conflict and it will be tiring and it will be hard. It will involve confrontation, confession, honesty, courage, willingness to stand out or stand alone. To those older: you cannot plateau, zone out, go on autopilot, or retire from the fight. You are either gaining ground or losing, it's that simple.

Guys: have an accountability partner to help guard from not just sexual immorality, but pride, and worldly ways of thinking. Next fall: Men's Fraternity. Girls: have an older woman be you mentor and help you to make decisions on life and relationships, and modesty. Find someone whose beauty comes from within, and ask if what you wear is appropriate to someone in Christ's kingdom. Get your pattern on life, relationships and appearance from godly women rather than *Cosmopolitan* or *Vanity Fair*.

Limit your exposure to internet, videos, entertainment... not just the bad, but the excessive. You can waste untold hours feeding on that which is substantially nothing and eternally irrelevant. And when you come to God's word you will have no hunger for it. As parents we know what it is like when our children gorge themselves on junk food and then cannot eat or appreciate steak when it is offered. Either you will be fed from God's word, or you will starve on the world's ways.

Pray. Jesus repeatedly told his disciples before he left that they should "watch and pray" and "stay alert, be sober, be watchful." We must keep seeking the Lord and his grace to stand in this world. David Wells writes, "What, then, is the nature of petitionary prayer? It is, in essence, rebellion - rebellion against the world in all its fallen-ness, the absolute and undying refusal to accept as normal what is pervasively abnormal. To pray declares that God and his world are at cross-purposes; to "sleep," or "faint," or "lose heart" is to act as if they are not." (David Wells) The world, the flesh, and the devil are formidable and strong opponents. There may be some of you listening to me now that next year at this time may no longer be walking with the Lord. "Watch and pray!" Jesus warned.

There is a conflict between worlds and world-views. You cannot avoid this. You must be engaged in the fight. The sinful nature in our flesh must be reckoned no longer our guiding passion, but we are to be led by the Spirit. The world will continually press its views and values upon us, and we must be continually be renewed in our thinking and behavior so that we might walk worthy of God's Kingdom. Next week: "the Fight, part 2", on Satan.

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Appendix. Two additional questions...

What is it that characterizes the world?

- Human pretense rather than God's grace.
- Secularism instead of theism.
- Superstition instead of true worship.
- Pride instead of humility.
- Vanity rather than modesty.
- Attaining rather than giving.
- Ruling rather than serving.
- Appearance over substance.
- Pleasure rather than self-denial.
- Possessions over relationships.
- Relationships over truth.
- People's approval over God's approval.
- Hype rather than holiness.
- Lies rather than truth.

How do I know if I love the world?

- Where does my self-image and esteem come from... from others or from God? Do I seek the Lord's pleasure and approval more than other people?
- Are there cravings in my life that I have surrendered to and habitually yield to?
- Do I dress to be noticed by others or to bring honor to God?
- Are my personal ethics based upon popular opinion and prevailing cultural values, or upon the revealed will of God?
- Do I find my personal security and significance in my job, my savings, my house and possessions, rather than in the God who provides?
- Do I achieve accomplishments to hear the praise of others, or that I might be please God and be faithful to him?
- Do I use power to coerce and manipulate and get my way, or to love and serve for Jesus' sake?
- Do I see God's will as good and desire to observe his commandments, or do I see his will as a hindrance and so live as I want to?
- Do I think more of my work and world, or his work and his kingdom?
- Is my desire for anything in the world greater than my desire to please the Father?