

Love Not the World

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There are many ways to stumble in the Christian life and we need help in each and every one of them. Without trying to be exhaustive in listing out the dangers and the pitfalls that we can fall into, there are matters of doubt and discouragement that can weigh us down, there are matters of temptation and pride that can lead us away from Christ as we seek to walk with him, and there are also matters of ignorance and error that we can fall into, and it's obvious that we could never walk the Christian life in our own strength and power in light of those things. Who is able to thoroughly avoid discouragement and despair and thoroughly, successfully, always overcome temptation and the pride of life? Who is able to know all of the full doctrines of Scripture and to avoid the errors that ignorance leads us into? The Bible is a big book, there is a lot of theology to everything and along the way all of those different things have a way of attacking us and causing us to trip and stumble from various different perspectives at various different times, and the further that we go into the Christian life, I think that a growing awareness of these things brings us to a greater position of humility. We recognize that we fall short in our own personal lives, we recognize that there are many things that we don't know and that we don't understand, and we recognize that we are prone to sinfulness, we are prone to say the wrong things, we are prone to think the wrong things, we are prone to love the wrong things, especially as we walk about in the environment of this world that is designed by Satan to tempt us away from everything that we hold dear in Christ. And so there are a lot of ways to stumble in this world and that's all the reason that we need, I guess in one sense, to say that we want to love not the world. Love not the world would be the title of today's message if you're taking notes, and in this extended passage that we're going to look at, we're going to see three different kinds of words from the Apostle John to address each of those different areas of weakness to which we are subject. John here is writing one of the last books of the New Testament, he is in his late 80s, perhaps his early 90s as he writes, he is writing to people that are almost universally all younger than he is, and he realizes that he is passing, as it were, the apostolic baton to the next generation of believers to go forward and so there is a lot to be said.

You know, I've seen many older people walk through the valley of the shadow of death and Christians have a way of doing that courageously, joyfully, but there is at least often a sense of wanting to communicate things to their children, to their grandchildren; they're about to depart and they're wanting to leave behind words of enduring significance that would strengthen the generation to come after them. Well, I think there's probably a bit of

a spirit of this in the things that John says in this section of Scripture. There are things that we all need to hear whether we are the newest of believers or the most seasoned of saints, we need these words of encouragement, of exhortation, and of examination that are found for us in this passage of Scripture and this is another section where I probably originally preached four or five messages back eight years ago, I'm going to condense it all into one message here today and so this is very much an overview. I encourage you if you find things that intrigue you, to go back to those messages from 2012, you can find them on SermonAudio or our website and to study them in greater depth. Here we just want to see an overview and we get a sense of the comprehensive way that Christ has provided for us as believers. He has provided everything that we need to walk with him and he has provided for all of our sins with his shed blood. We need that encouragement to realize that now that we are in Christ we need to always come back to the fact that there is no barrier to our fellowship with God. Christ has taken away every sin that would hinder us, he has bestowed upon us an eternal love that informs the very fiber of every aspect of our walk with Christ and therefore we can come to him with confidence. Even in the weakness of our despair and discouragement, even in the weakness of our foolish pride and our temptations, and even in the midst of our ignorance and error, we can come to Christ and find that here we have a friend for sinners, one who loves us and protects us and welcomes us into the family of God.

So let's look at this blessed passage with the hope and trust and expectation that our Lord will use it mightily in our lives, and for those of you that aren't Christians, to realize that there is a loving invitation from Christ himself to you being communicated to you by the Holy Spirit in the depths of your heart calling you to come to Christ, calling you out of the world and calling you into this realm of love and forgiveness and godliness that would be the answer to the deepest longings of your unsaved heart. So with the spirit of trusting in Christ, we come to God's word here now and in this opening section in verses 12 through 14 of what I read earlier from chapter 2, we find, first of all, this word of encouragement. A word of encouragement that John gives to his readers and this is so vitally important to understanding the entire nature of the letter of 1 John.

You know, it's possible and I've heard men handle 1 John in a way, many of you have probably thought of 1 John as a book that gives you all of the tests to determine whether you are a true Christian or not, and there are certainly those tests in there. Last time when we got together on Thursday, we saw the moral test of obedience and the social test of love to be marks of the true believer, but you need to understand this, my friends, you need to understand that these tests that John give are given in the context of writing to people that he was assuring and giving confidence to them that they are true Christians. It's not simply a cold, rigid test, "Do you see this? Do you see this? Do you see this in your life?" As though it were written in an accusing tone of voice that would make people walk away cold and uncertain and heightened in their fears because of the lofty nature of the things that he says. No, John writes as a pastor who loves these people and he's writing to encourage them and he writes to affirm them in their salvation even as he says other things that are woven throughout the letter. And so you must understand that we can come to this portion of Scripture and we can come to this letter of 1 John with a sense of trust and confidence and encouragement for us as believers that God wants to

calm the billows of our heart and to help us enter into a greater fuller assurance of our salvation through the things that are said. I remind you, chapter 1, verse 4, he wrote to promote our joy. Chapter 2, verse 1, he wrote to promote our holiness. Chapter 5, verse 13, he wrote to promote our assurance of salvation. So this is not a cold accusing letter that we are reading here, this is coming from one who loves the people of God writing under the inspiration of the one who supremely loved the people of God, and therefore is meant to bring us into a sense of confidence and a sense of love and confidence that flows from the knowledge that Christ has loved us, that Christ has truly redeemed us and therefore it is well with our souls. Oh, do we need this in this fallen wicked world in which we live, do we need this as we walk through our own lives with our own fallenness and flesh messing things up for us along the way, stumbling along the way, how we need what is said in this passage of Scripture.

Let's look at these first three verses. I'll read them in an overview fashion and then just make a few passing comments about them and you'll see this tone of love and encouragement that is written in the things that are said. Chapter 2, verse 12 he says,

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Now I want you to understand something about this passage that I consider to be really important: the totality of what he says here is written to the totality of his readers. There are some who isolate things and say this part is written to one group and this part to another and this part to another, but I think that that misses the overall context of the whole book. Throughout the book of 1 John, throughout this wonderful letter that God has given to us in his word, he addresses all of his readers as little children, addresses them all as beloved, addresses them all as brethren, and so he has the totality of his audience in mind and when he says here as he starts in verse 12, "I am writing to you, little children," well, this is the same way that he addressed them in chapter 2, verse 1, when he said, "My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin." He's writing so that all of his readers would not sin, not simply those that are the most spiritually immature, for example, he's writing to all of them, to promote the holiness in all of them, and so here he's writing to his readers, those that are the faithful Christians and he says, "I'm writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for his name's sake." So he's writing to promote this sense of assurance in them and he writes in these reassuring tones and says these great words of affirmation and declaring truth after truth after truth that applies to them that are in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let's look at those for a moment. We'll deal with fathers and young men in just a moment, but we want to see that these are things that are true of every Christian, not simply individual, not simply those of particular categories. He says your sins have been forgiven you for his name's sake. He says you know him who has been from the beginning. You have overcome the evil one. You know the Father. You know him who has been from the beginning, verse 14. You're strong. The word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one. Well, friends, true Christians have overcome the evil one. All of us have from the youngest saint to the most mature one. Colossians 1 says that we have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of his beloved Son. Satan is no longer our father but God our heavenly Father is our father. We are no longer dominated by the devil and dead in trespasses and sins but God has made us alive together in Christ. We have been born again. The Spirit of God has imparted a new nature to us. And so these are things that are designed to encourage us in the midst of the difficulties in which we walk in this life. So my Christian friend, my brother, my sister in Christ, even thinking of some of you younger people that have made professions of Christ at an early age and you're seeking to grow in the context of the Christian family that God has so graciously put you in, what I want you to see here is that these things that speak about forgiveness of sin, being free from the power of the devil, being accepted by God, are things that belong to everyone that is in Christ. "Little children," he says, "these things are true about you." So it's a wonderful encouragement that he is giving.

Now why would he say it here? Why would he say these things here? Very important to understand the flow of thought that is going on here. He has said earlier and we looked at these and spoke pretty strongly about these things last time, but look for example, we won't review all of this even though we could but I don't want to preach for four and half hours here today like I'm prone to do, he said in chapter 2, verse 4, for example, he says, "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." He goes on and he says in verse 9, he says, "The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now." Verse 11, "the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." Well, you see, he's been making some pretty strong statements, I say pretty strong, he's been making very strong statements here that are distinguishing the true Christians to whom he is writing and distinguishing them from the false teachers who were marked by this disobedient lifestyle and by this unloving lifestyle, and he has been speaking sharply to rebuke the false teachers even while he has been setting the tone for what marks the life of a true Christian. Well in a sense, what he's done here in this section, verses 12 through 14 is he's called a bit of a time out, you might say, and he's paused to step back from the admonitions and the warnings and the very severe tones that he had been speaking in that earlier section, he pauses to clarify for the Christian audience to which he is writing that those things of severity that he is writing against false teachers is not the way that he thinks about them. He is not trying to undermine their assurance by saying these things, he's trying to protect them from those who would harm them.

So he comes to them and he clarifies for them, he says, "My little children, I want you to know that when I think about you, when I think about you true Christians, I want you to know that I think of you in the most positive terms. I have the deepest of confidence about who you really are in Christ and I just want to remind you of those things," he says to them. "Your sins are forgiven. You belong to God. You have overcome the evil one. You're strong. The word of God abides in you," and on and on he goes, and so he's writing to give them this sense of encouragement to clarify who he is addressing with some of the things that he says and who he is not. And if you go down to verse 20 and 21 that we'll come to in just a moment, you'll see this repeated again. He says, "you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know." And he says, "I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth." So he's saying, "I'm writing to you because you know the truth. I'm writing to you because you are in Christ, because you are forgiven, because you do know God. This is why I'm writing to you."

So you see that there is this deeply warm pastoral care that he has for his readers that we should never miss as we go through the book of 1 John or we will greatly misinterpret the entire manner in which this book is to be understood. This is not a severe letter that questions the salvation of everyone who reads it, this is a letter that speaks in the loving tones of Christ himself toward his people to encourage them. Think of a shepherd having gathered all of his sheep into the fold for the night and he passes through them and he's protected them and they are well fed and they are cared for and they are safe for another night, and the shepherd is moving about their midst and his voice is calming them and reassuring them. My friend, that's a picture, my Christian friend, that's the sense in which this letter comes to you today is that God is speaking to bring peace to your heart, to bring encouragement to you to recognize that even if you have stumbled in this past week in bad ways even, to realize that the Father still loves you, that the cleansing blood of Christ is still fully as operative as it ever was before in your life, that the Spirit still abides in you and the Triune God has brought you to himself in a way that he will never let you fall away from. He loves you, your sins are forgiven and you are still fully reconciled to a holy God in the Lord Jesus Christ. So this is a great word of encouragement that we all need to hear in the midst of the doubt and the discouragement and the failures of the past week. Christ comes to us, refreshes our hearts with a new expression, a new manifestation through familiar words of his love toward us.

So his word against the deceivers are not directed against everyone. Now he does address fathers and young men, it's obvious that he's making some distinctions in what he says here, but it's not in the sense that these things are mutually exclusive so that what is said to the fathers only applies to them and not to the so-called children or the so-called young men, he is just recognizing that there are chronological differences in age in his audience and there are different levels of maturity in his audience. So he speaks to a particular group to emphasize something to them without excluding the others from what is said, and so the fathers may have a different level of age and experience than the young men do, but they will all gain the victory over Satan when it's all said and done. So he encourages them in this way.

And let me just point out one final aspect of this letter that I want to point out to you here. It seems like he's saying the same thing maybe with some slightly different language, but it seems like he's repeating himself here in what he says. "I'm writing to you, little children, because you've been forgiven for His name's sake." Verse 13, "I've written to you, children, because you know the Father." Okay, verse 13, "I'm writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning." Verse 14, I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning." Well, I thought you just said that, why are you saying it again? Verse 13, "I'm writing to you, young men, because you've overcome the evil one." Verse 14, "I've written to you, young man, because you're strong, the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one." Well, you know, at 90 years old what's the deal here? Is his mind slipping a little bit so that he's starting to repeat himself because of the effects of old age? Is that what's going on here? Well, to ask the question like that is to obviously answer it, "No, that's not what's going on here." Why would he repeat himself here and what does it say to us about the pastoral tone in which he writes? Friends, understand this: he's repeating himself for the sake of emphasis. He said, "I want you to understand this and so that you don't miss it, let me say it again. I'll say it to you. I'll say it to you. I'll say it to you. Understand that what I just said I repeat it again for emphasis." This is the way that most preaching is done, preachers will repeat themselves to help impress the truths of what is being said upon their audience, and realize this, that particularly in the days before modern printing, the things that we now use to indicate emphasis in our modern print that we take for granted were not available back then. It wasn't the way that things were done. We can now do things with italics or a bold font or a larger font, we can put in exclamation points, we could make it red, we could make it yellow to highlight it, there's all kinds of ways that we could do to draw particular emphasis to what's being said so that it would stand out in importance to make sure that the important thing that we're trying to communicate is not lost because our readers pass over it too quickly. Well, what John is doing here is he is giving an emphasis to this word of encouragement that he says. He repeats it as to make sure that they don't miss it. He says, "Your sins are forgiven for His name's sake. Did you hear me? Let me say it again, your sins are forgiven for His name's sake. You know the Father, you know the eternal God through faith in Jesus Christ. Did you hear what I just said? Did you catch the significance of that? You know the eternal God. Oh, you young men, you're entering into the early stages of maturity in the Christian life, do you understand that you've overcome Satan? Do you understand the Spirit of God abides in you? Let me say it again and in case you missed it and I know that you're prone to discouragement, you're prone to miss this, let me just say it again. You have overcome the evil one. You have overcome Satan himself so that the devil no longer has claim on you, the devil is no longer a permanent threat to the eternal existence of your soul." That's what he's doing here. It's not just that he's giving them a word of encouragement, he's giving them an emphatic word of encouragement so that they couldn't miss it.

So as you read through the course of the letter he says, "By this we know we've come to know Him if we keep His commandments. Those who don't keep His commandments, liar, antichrist, deceived. But understand, understand," he says, "as you are reading these things that I see you from a different light." And his readers, the true Christians that are

hearing this are to draw deep profound encouragement from that manner of address and even to today those of us, some of you that are weak and trembling and you're fearful and timid by nature, by constitution, you're just naturally timid in soul and you're easily discouraged and you're easily introspective and you easily wonder, "You know, how is it with me and my soul and Christ again?" For people like you, the word of God comes in a great act of lovingkindness and loving condescension to you to strengthen and emphasize to you that when Christ saved you once, he saved you forever and that there is now therefore no condemnation in Christ and there is nothing that can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. You need that word of encouragement this morning? Well, I'm glad the Lord brought you here. I need it. You need it. We all need to understand that Christ has loved us and has done everything necessary for the good of our soul and this applies to every Christian, not a select few. There is no second blessing, there's nothing that God gives to a certain smaller group of Christians that he doesn't give to everyone. This is for everyone that is truly in Christ to know that the Spirit of God truly indwells with you and the love of God is an abiding certainty in your life. That's the reality of what it means to be in Christ and that's a great word of encouragement for us here today.

Well, as he goes on we see that there's more than encouragement that we need because while we do fall into the timid nature of our soul sometimes, we fall into doubt or discouragement or despair, there's also another aspect inside us that we need to address, the darker side of us, you might say, the remnants of our flesh, the indwelling sin. You and I have not yet been made perfect. You and I still have things inside us that tempt us to sin as well as the world environment in which we live and we're prone to wander, as the hymn writer said, "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." Well, for that aspect of our existence, that aspect of our nature, we need not so much a word of encouragement but we need a word of exhortation and that brings us to our second point for this morning. John gives us a word of exhortation. They are in the faith, his readers are, they are true Christians, he has the highest aspirations for what will come of them in the end, and yet they are also in the midst of a battle. They are in the midst of a battle in the environment in which they live and there are also battles within our own souls that would pull us away from this wonderful security and position that we have in Christ, and so he addresses that now and it's helpful for us to understand that.

Let's just step back for a moment and recognize that. We need the fullness of the teaching of the word of God because there are multiple foes to the good of our soul, there are multiple enemies and it's not simply discouragement so that we only need encouragement along the way, you know, sometimes some of us, we get kind of lazy or we get enamored with the world around us, we start to give in to the temptations of us and it's just, you know, and there's a careless, sometimes a self-willed rebellion that's in the midst of it and we need to be honest with ourselves about this and people who are drifting into that kind of self-willed rebellion or just falling into indifference or falling into a love and a fascination with the things of this world, they need the word of God to come to them and speak to them and say, "Oh, hold it! Hold it! Wake up! Look at what you're doing, this is not the way to go." And it's not that they need a stroke on their neck to calm them, they need something to wake them up, they need a cold splash in the face to say, "Look, what

are you doing here?" We need different kinds of encouragement because there are different ways that we can stumble, and so John here comes and gives a word of exhortation.

Let's look at it in these three verses, verses 15 through 17. He says,

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. 16 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. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

And so as you and I walk through this world, we are subject to conflicting desires even within ourselves. You know, Paul as I've referred to several times over the past several messages, Paul had this sense of competing desires within him as a mature Christian that he expressed in Romans 7, "The evil I don't want to do, I do. The good things I want to do, I don't do." He says, "I find that there is a principle of sin, there is a principle of evil within me, the one who wants to do good. There's a battle that's taking place." We are a new creation in Christ, my friends, 2 Corinthians 5:17, and we have been born again by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God has regenerated us, he has given us new life but what we need to understand is this and we need to think carefully about this: while it is new life, it is new life that finds its source in the very nature and character of God itself, God saw fit not to give us a perfect spiritual life from the beginning. It is new, it is powerful, it is sufficient, but that does not mean that it is beyond temptation and sin. Scripture teaches this and your own sad experience confirms it. We've been born again but we have not yet been made perfect and understanding that can give us a great sense of understanding as we approach a passage like this. You and I are still subject to the conflicting desires of our inner man and of the world around us and so John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he warns us against undue affections for this evil system in which we live and to watch over our hearts with all diligence so that there would be no evil root of disaffection, no evil root of love for the world, no evil root of bitterness taking root in our hearts but that we would ever be mindful like a careful gardener watching over the weeds that would take away the nutrients from his prized flowers or his prized vegetables and he goes and he plucks out those weeds and has to go back to it again and again to keep the garden fresh and pure so that the plants will flourish. Well, in the same way we come and we watch over our souls with all diligence so that these things would not overrun this new life that God has given to us.

You can understand that and what he does is he gives us two reasons in this subpart, there are two subpoints here in this word of exhortation that he gives us. When he says, "Do not love the world," it has the idea of, "Stop loving the world," or perhaps a little bit better, "Make it your habit not to love the world. Develop within your mind a settled ongoing perspective that is opposed to the world around you." And as a new Christian, you know, you need to come to a recognition and there needs to be a clear break in your mind and a clear break in your heart from the prior loves of your life and the prior evil affections that you have, there needs to be this clarity of separation that says, "I've left

that behind. I have new life and my new desires and my new affections are oriented toward this new life that God has given to me." And you see it expressed in two different ways. He gives us two reasons to undergird that mindset of separation so that we would pursue the things of God rather than being sucked back like a vacuum into the prior life that we once knew.

So what are these two reasons? Well first of all, he says, "The world opposes the Father." The world opposes the Father. Look at verses 15 and 16 with me here. He says, "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." Then notice that little word "for." For. He is giving the reason for that command not to love the world. He has just prohibited us from giving our affections to the world in which we live. And why is that? He undergirds it with understanding. He tells us why it is that we should obey this command and he says here in verse 16, he says, "For all that is in the world," then he divides it further, "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life," he subdivides it but he gives us a sense that all that's in the world, specifically what I mean by that, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, all that is in the world "is not from the Father, but is from the world." So the idea, the thought is this: God the Father has loved you and sent Jesus Christ to be the propitiation for your sins, God the Father loves you and seeks your joy and your holiness and the assurance of your salvation through the things that are being said in this letter, and everything that is in the world is opposed to that, undermines that, sucks that away, takes it away and undermines it so that your Christian life is not at all the joyful experience that it is meant to be, so that your Christian testimony to the world around you is diminished and tarnished and undermined by these inordinate affections in your heart, and so he says, "This is not from the Father who saved you, and so understand that so that it would strengthen your resolve against it."

The lust of the flesh refers to those sinful desires that are within us that bubble up within our own hearts. The lust of the eyes refer to the temptations that are outside of us that we see and gain access to our minds through the organ of our vision. You think of Eve looking at the forbidden fruit and it was appealing to her even though it was something that she was not to have. David looked out and saw Bathsheba bathing and through the temptation that was introduced to him through his eyes, fell into great sin that lead to even greater sins along the way, it was such a destructive episode in his life. So John says, "Watch out for the lust of the eyes." Then the boastfulness of life, that sense of arrogance, that sense of arrogance over your circumstances. Maybe you're wealthy, maybe you've got a brilliant mind, maybe you've got other skills that others don't have, God has particularly blessed you in ways, easy to start to elevate yourself and like Nebuchadnezzar say, "Is this not great Babylon that I have built with my own hands?" And to appropriate all the glory to yourself. John says, "Turn away from that. Turn away from that kind of pride. Be aware of the lusts that are within you. Be aware of the temptations that come to you through the environment in which you live."

So he calls us to see all of those things with different eyes, with a different perspective than what we would naturally fall back into. He says, "Despite the fact that this is attractive to you, despite the fact that you are inclined toward this at times, understand

that all of that is not from the Father but it is from the world." It's a sharp contrast that he makes. "It's not this but it is this. It is not the life-giving water that comes from God, rather it is the sewage of the world." You know, none of us would naturally drink raw sewage. The thought is appalling, it is repulsive to us, especially when there's fresh clear water that's right beside us. Well, understand in a spiritual sense the temptations don't come to us in the repulsive outward appearance of raw sewage, there's a certain element of attraction to them, but we need to understand that outside that thin veneer is, in fact, the raw sewage that would poison our spiritual lives and so you go, "No! That's not what I'm about. No! That's not what I want." And John's instruction here reinforces our desires for godliness by exposing the source of where those inordinate affections come from.

These two realms, the Father and the world, they are mutually exclusive and what John is saying is you are not of the world, Christian friend, and therefore don't stepped toward it. Don't step into it. Recognize it for what it is. Turn your back on it and come back to the love of God found in the word, the word written, the 66 books of the Bible, and the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ. Friends, that's where your life is, my Christian friends, it's in the word of God. It's in our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what you set your affections on. This is what you devote your attention to. This is what you build your life on. And so we see the distinction between the Father and the world and it helps us receive better that exhortation, "Don't love the world." You realize that its source is something different.

He goes further, he goes further beyond the fact that it's not from the Father and gives something that is particularly helpful, particularly strengthening for us, something that gives us a perspective that sustains us in that lifelong growth in sanctification and it's this, it is this, it's that the world is temporary. The world is temporary. So he said, "Don't love the world because it's not from the Father," in verse 17 we see that the world is temporary and that gives a second reason to not love it. Verse 17 he says, "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." He says it's the nature of the world that it's transitory, that it is passing, that it is undependable. And you know, and we, you know, if you watch the news at all from day to day, from week to week, you see how another figure from the past once popular has, and you're reading their obituary, they've passed away, maybe you have a hometown newspaper like you do and you read and you see the names of people that lived for a long time but now they're gone and all of the things that they pursued in life have perished with them. And it's, you know, it's kind of sad to think about those things but John isn't writing here to make us sad, what he's doing here is he's writing to help us be realistic so that we would devote our lives to the things that matter. You see, my friend, that as you pursue the temptations of the world, that you pursue the foolish things that men boast about in life, the things of possessions or the things of prestige, it's all passing. It doesn't last. You know, you can spend your life, just to give a particular illustration, you could spend the years of your youth pursuing the perfection of your physical body with all manner of physical exercise and all manner of beauty treatments and all of that to make the outward man look as good as possible. Now I'm not against exercise, I'm not against people wearing makeup, that's not my point. Men, you might stay away from the makeup but that's not what I'm getting at here. What I want you to see is that the attention that's given to those things in the early years, it inevitably fails. It can do nothing else but fail you in the end. The time will come

when gravity wins over your body. The time will come, more importantly, when death wins over life for you, and it is your breathless corpse that is being escorted to the cemetery, and then what is John's point, then what? Then what with all that you pursued in your life and all of the earthbound priorities and activities that you gave yourself to, what becomes of them? What becomes of them is that they die with you and as the patriarch Job said, "Naked I came into this world, naked I'll return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." He says, "I came into this world with nothing and I'm leaving with nothing."

Well, my friend, John tells you to understand that and to adopt that as your perspective on the world, that the things of this are passing away and that shapes the affection and the attention that you give to them, and he says by contrast, he says, "The one who does the will of God abides forever." So since the things of this world are subject to loss at any time, then in the language of Matthew 6:33, "Seek first His righteousness and His kingdom and all these things will be added to you." Make it your desire to know this God who has saved you. Make it a priority, a high priority in your life to know this word in which he has revealed himself because those are the things that are going to last, these other things of life are not and therefore it shapes what you love in life. And the purpose, the sense of what John is saying is this: why would you entangle yourself so deeply in the affairs of the world system when you know that it's passing away, when you know that you have an eternally secure position in Christ? This world is not your home. Our citizenship, Philippians 3, our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform the present body of this death into conformity with the body of his glory. Don't you see that while you're living in this environment physically for the time, that your real life, your real affections, the real purpose of your existence lies beyond this world and therefore you give yourself to those things that are of Christ, you set your affections, your hope on those things and you let this world come and go as it please.

So what John gives us here in this word of exhortation is it's a call to examine your priorities and how you invest your time and what is it that you are truly seeking after. Friends, it's appropriate in light of a passage like this to ask this simple question, this simple question: what place does Christ have in your life? What place does his word have in your affections? Is Christ more precious to you than everything else? That's what John is calling you to. Of course we have to work our jobs. Of course we have to work in our secular employments. Of course we have to take care of the affairs of life that make life possible here, we have to buy groceries, we have to pay bills and all of that. We understand that, the question is where are you setting your heart affections, what is it that you love most? Are those other things simply a means to the greater end of living for Christ and loving him, or are they an end in themselves? That's the distinction that we have to sort through and some of you on the front end of life making career decisions, deciding where life is going to go, you know, what you're going to do with the talents that the Lord has given to you, oh, my young people friends, I just encourage you, I encourage so much just approach life this way, as a pastor I encourage you and call you and plead with you to approach life this way: don't start with the question what am I going to do, don't start with that question as you're figuring out what you want to do with

life, start with this question, why am I going to do it? Why am I going to do it? Why brings you into the realm of priorities and motivations and, my young Christian friend, what the why question does especially on the front end of life for you is this, is it says, "Well, I want live my life to the glory of the One who saved me. I want live to the glory of Jesus Christ. Now how can I do that with the talents that I have?" You see, that's a much different trajectory than just saying, "What do I want to do? Where can I make the most money? Or where can I do what I really want?" And without realizing it, without even intending to, my friend, you push Christ off to the side and you just think about your aspirations in purely earthly terms rather than thinking about what the ultimate objective of it all is. These are difficult things to think through. It's hard to sort through all of the different attitudes that we bring to life and that's why Moses in Psalm 90 said, "O God, teach us to number our days so that we could apply our hearts to wisdom. Lord, help me realize that this world is passing, help me to realize that this world is temporary, it's brief and, Lord, as You cultivate that understanding in my mindset, then let me live life in a way that is wise in respect to the limited duration of it all. Let me live in a way that is wise and that is under Your glory using this brief opportunity of life to maximize the way that my life is used to Your glory and that maximizes the expression of my affections for Jesus Christ."

That's for you young people on the front end of these things. What about those of us that are, you know, we're on the backside of 30, we are on the backside of 40, we're on the backside of 50, some of you on the backside of 60 and 70, what about you then in light of these things? Well, even if you squandered major portions of your life as you contemplate these things, my Christian friend, I want you to understand that there's hope and encouragement and there's direction here for you as well in it all because Moses in Psalm 90, he went further and he is writing at the very end of his life, he probably only had another year or two at most to live as he was penning those words in Psalm 90, and what did he say in response to the temporary nature of life?

Well, I want you to turn to Psalm 90 for just a moment here. We taught on Psalm 90, ah, I don't know, a year and a half ago maybe. I've taught it many times. Its words have impressed themselves, they've been embedded deeply in my heart and mind here. What is it that we say as we're realizing that life is accelerating and that most, the greater majority of our years are behind us? How do we think about it in light of those things? Well, in Psalm 90:13 Moses said, "Do return, O LORD; how long will it be? And be sorry for Your servants." Lord, have mercy on me in these latter days of my life. Lord, show kindness to me so that in verse 14, so that I could "be satisfied in the morning with Your faithful love, so that I could sing for joy and be glad all our days." Verse 16, "Let Your work appear to us, Your majesty to their children." And he closes in this prayer and my older friends, I'm thinking of some of you by name and by face, I want you to know that I'm not preaching in an impersonal way, I'm preaching to you personally even though we're not in each other's physical presence, and I need these words too even as I give them to those of you that are older saints. Moses prays and he says in verse 17, "Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; And confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands." And while you may not have a lot of years to plan for as somebody that's in their 20s, what you need to understand is this, is that the brevity of life

at this stage in life stirs us up to an even deeper earnestness and an even deeper dependence on God as we say, "Lord, I don't want to love the world. I understand that this world is temporary and as I look at the calendar, I realize that it's likely that my life, remaining life span is temporary." So you and I approach it like this, "O God, have mercy on me. The days are short and so I need Your mercy to make the best use of them, and as I do that, Lord, confirm the work of my hands, confirm what I'm doing. Bless it, Lord. Give Your help to it. Do something through me in what I do, work through it and in me and through my influence and confirm it so that it would be something of lasting value to those who come after me. Give me something, Father, that would outlive me. Do a work through me that lives beyond the scope of my physical life, that the influence of what You do in me and through me would have an effect even if I'm not here on earth to see it."

You see, God can do that, God does that. Don't some of you have the memory of a godly mother, a godly father, a godly grandparent who is now gone to be with the Lord but their words of encouragement, their words of blessing, their words of advice, their example affects you and influences you to this day? You find yourself asking, "I wonder what mom would have done here? I wonder what Scripture mom would have turned to here?" That kind of thing. Well, that kind of lasting influence occurs when you have put aside the love of the world, you've recognized its passing nature, you've recognized your passing nature in a way that causes you to devote yourself to godliness, to devote yourself to an expression to giving expression to the life of the Holy Spirit who dwells within you. And you know, my older friends, some of you do this so magnificently. You are an example to me this way. You can do that joyfully, you can do it cheerfully. You know, we have older saints in our congregation, I'm thinking of some of you that normally sit off to my left here, not to the exclusion of those that sit to my right, but just your cheerful faithfulness, the joy that you find in living life, I want to tell you there's a massive impact to that. Your example is influencing all of us and encouraging all of us and though the years may be largely passed for you, it may be passing in that way, the Lord is confirming the work of your life, the Lord is confirming the nature of your life to benefit those of us who are around who are coming up just a little bit behind the train behind you.

So friends, I guess we could ask the question this way: is your life marked by the things that you want to leave behind? Is what you're giving your life to now, the way that you're living looking at the perspective of the end of your life, looking back, looking to beyond the time after you're gone, is your life being devoted to those things that you want to linger on after you're gone? Those are searching questions. That's why we say it's a word of exhortation that John has given us here all designed to promote our joy, our holiness and our assurance but reminding us that life is serious and we're living it in a hostile alien environment that has the ability to erode those commitments and erode those priorities, just like termites in the hidden woodwork just chipping away, chewing away at the things that makes the structure strong, you know, we examine these things and look for things that would undermine that lasting influence that John calls us to here. Well, I'll just commend that to you and, you know, in the hopes that the Holy Spirit will apply that young or old, that you would find encouragement for the day ahead from those things.

Let's go to the third and final point for this morning and it's a word of examination. A word of examination. John now, he shifts into a different realm and he's laying out now the importance of doctrine, biblical doctrine in the Christian life. Look at verses 18 through 23. This is the final aspect of the passage for this morning. He says,

18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. 20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. 21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

So John is returning now, he's coming to this theme of discernment, examining what it is that we believe. He has spoken to them about the moral test of a true Christian being marked by obedience, the social test of love for the brethren, and now he comes to this doctrinal test of true Christianity.

This is a test of discernment about your view of Christ and he says in verse 18, look at it there with me, he says, "You've heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour." And here's the basic thought of it: Christ has now come. This is not from an Old Testament perspective looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, rather the Messiah has come. He has done his work. Christ has done his work and now in response to that Satan has stirred up the evil world system against Christ and false teaching about Christ was now being introduced into the realm of the church now that Christ has come. And these particular false teachers had a bizarre notion about Christ where they say that he was a regular human being and he was born in a normal way with a human man, human father, he was born that way but at his baptism the Christ spirit came upon him and that explains the life of his public ministry, but when he was crucified that Christ spirit left him and he died as just a man. They were giving a false teaching of Christ. It had the appearance of secret knowledge that would draw the true disciples away to this esoteric idea and explanation of things, but what they were really doing was antichrist in the sense that it was opposed to the true Christ who was God in human flesh, eternally God coming into humanity in order to bear our sins at the cross as the God-man giving his life with infinite value, giving his life with an infinite dimension because of the nature of God that was truly his, and therefore being able to die for the sins of many because of the infinite aspect of his life.

Well, the false teachers denied all of that and the reality of their opposition of Christ shows that it was the last hour by which John means is that we've entered into a new

realm of God's dispensation toward men. Christ has finished his work and now we're living in a realm of the last hour meaning that what comes next is the return of Christ, and because these antichrists are going about, we understand that we are in a new realm, a new dimension now, and in verse 18, look at it there with me, he said, "just as you heard that antichrist is coming," he has the idea of that great final coming time when the Antichrist appears who will oppose Christ at the end of the age, that's still yet to come for us even, but what he says is that even now many antichrists have appeared and what he means by that is this, is that these false teachers, the false teachers that infiltrate the church, that harass the church, that confuse the church, these false teachers who are opposing the true Christ, opposing true doctrine, they're acting in the same spirit that will animate the great and final antichrist.

There are many antichrists in this sense because there is so much false teaching that goes about and he says the spirit that will one day animate the great final antichrist is alive and animating the false teachers that are around us here today, and he says here's a way that you can discern them. You know, if the teaching gets, you know, the teaching can get pretty sophisticated, you know, in a carnal ungodly way, it can be confusing especially for new babes in Christ maybe coming out of false systems of religion. You've truly been saved but you've got a lot of carryover baggage from the things that you were taught in the past. Oh, those of you that have come out of a charismatic background, for example, and all of the Satan binding and knocking people over and people speaking in tongues and just all of the spiritual confusion of all of that, and you've come out of that and you're trying to sort your way through it, it's hard. For those of you that have come out of a works based religion, you know, and you think that you've got to earn the pleasure of God by your obedience to external laws and, yeah, you've heard the grace of Christ and you've believed in him but there's still a hangover, there's still a carryover effect from what was ingrained in you and from your youth. Well, we understand that discernment is not easy in those times and it's not always easy to find your way through all of that. The patient study of the word of God is ultimately the answer to that but what John does is to give you a sense of, is he lays down a bold statement that helps you identify true teachers from false. One way to discern false teachers is this, verse 19, he says, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us."

So the reality is this, is that for a time a man will appear to be a true Christian teacher. He'll open the Bible. He'll stand in a pulpit. He'll lead a church. There are men who gave up dating who illustrate this kind of teaching, those of you that know the ministry, the past ministry of Josh Harris know what I'm referring to. You know, men will look like the real thing for a time but they depart, they renounce their former claim of knowing Christ, they renounce the Gospel that they once seemed to proclaim. What John is saying here is when that happens, don't be misled and don't misunderstand. He said when people go out like that, it shows that they were never true Christians to begin with because true Christians stay in the faith and it could be no other way because for you to become a Christian means that God has done a supernatural work in regeneration in your life, God has saved you, God has caused you to be born again, God worked and grabbed you, plucked you, as it were, and brought you into his family, and because salvation is an act

of God in which he carries out his eternal purpose in Christ in those that he saves, God keeps them. They continue. They persevere. And true Christians and true teachers stay. They stay because that's what true Christians do, and because true Christians stay, you can know for certain that when someone walks away, someone renounces his prior claim of Christ, they were never saved to begin with. And you say, "But the confession that they made, but look at how they preached, or look how long?" None of that matters. Don't be confused by that. If they had truly been of Christ, they would have stayed in Christ because the Spirit would have kept them in Christ. So John says, "They went out from us, they had outwardly identified with us for a time, but they went out which shows that they were never of us. They never shared our real life. They were tares among the wheat. They looked like the real thing but it was only an outward appearance."

So he comes to these believers who have been harassed by false teachers and he says, "Look, I know they went out and I know that they're trying to call you out away from apostolic teaching. Understand that this is what anti-Christian teachers do, this is what false teachers do, and the fact that they left shows that they were false. Because they're false," he strengthens them, he says, "Don't follow after them then. Stay where you are. Stay in the word of God. Stay in Christ. Stay with that realm of apostolic doctrine that comes from the true teaching of the word of God and don't follow after them no matter how appealing it may superficially seem to be. If they were of Christ, they would have stayed in Christ. The fact that they didn't reveals that they were never true believers to begin with and therefore," here's the point, "therefore now you in your Christian experience, you can safely disregard them without fear that you're missing the truth." It's wonderful, wonderful truth.

So we see John saying true Christians persevere in the faith. Look at verses 20 and 21, he says, "you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know." In contrast to these false teachers, you have the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is sufficient to teach you the truth, and even if your understanding is only basic, if you are in the Spirit he will continue to be your teacher, he will abide with you and help you continue to grow, and he says, "And I'm writing to you not because I think you're part of that false teaching system, I'm writing to you because you do know the truth and I'm strengthening you and helping your roots grow deeper so that you'll grow strong and you will stand firm in the faith." This is a great letter, isn't it? This is a wonderful book in the Bible.

So he exposes the false claims of the false teachers. He says they went away but they were never of us so don't worry about them. And throughout this passage, there has been blowing a gentle breeze of assurance throughout. In that word of encouragement, you know the Father. In that word of exhortation, don't love the world, devote your life to what belongs to you. Here he says in verses 20 and 21, you have the Holy Spirit, I'm writing to you because you know the truth and because no lie is of the truth, and there's just this wonderful breeze, this refreshing wind blowing through us that gives us comfort in all that we do. But he's not quite done with this section yet and that gentle breeze toward the true believers is now replaced by the thunderclap of rebuke to false teachers and now he rebukes them in verse 22, and we must remember that he's got two different audiences in mind. He's encouraged true Christians and now he exercises a polemic

against false teachers. He has gathered in the sheep with a gentle tone of voice and now he drives away the wolves with a sharp tone of voice, and in order to protect the sheep he sends away the wolves, verses 22 and 23.

Look at it with me. He says, "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" And Jesus of Nazareth, the man Jesus is himself the Christ. The false teachers had tried to distinguish between the human Jesus and the Christ spirit. John says Jesus is the Christ. He is God in human flesh and to deny that, to deny the deity of Christ in the humanity of Christ, to deny the full deity or the full humanity of Christ is to be an antichrist, it is to be a liar. And so he speaks with a firm rebuke against this doctrine as he examines what they claim.

So verse 22, "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also." So beloved, what he's saying here is this, again just in very summary fashion, go back to the 2012 messages for more on this, but your view of Christ, the doctrine that you hold and believe about Christ is another aspect of determining whether you are a true Christian or a false Christian. A true Christian without exception and only a true Christian makes this confession only about Christ, that he is God in human flesh. The Word was with God, the Word was God, and the Word became flesh. Jesus Christ was God eternal and in the person of Jesus he took on humanity onto his deity. Full deity came into full humanity. Full deity added full humanity to its nature and what John is saying here is that a false view of Christ means that you have a false Savior and do you know what you've got if you've got a false Savior? You've got a false salvation. You have no salvation at all. You must believe in the true Christ. You must believe that the Son is equal with the Father. You must believe that to look at Christ is to look at the very nature of the Father himself; that there is no difference in essence between them whatsoever. You confess the Son like that, you honor the Son like you honor the Father, that's the mark of a true Christian. To deny that is to show forth false doctrine, false Christ, false salvation, meaning that you're still an antichrist, you're still a child of the devil with that kind of teaching. So how does that apply today? Jehovah's Witnesses, false Christ, antichrist. Mormons, false Christ, antichrist. Way International, false Christ, antichrist. I get no delight out of saying these things but false teachers inevitably are presenting you with a false doctrine of Christ and so you must know and you must confess to be a true Christian that Jesus Christ, all the fullness of deity dwells in him in bodily form, Colossians 2:9, and in that doctrinal test what do you believe about Christ, we see a sharp dividing line between that which is true and that which is error and you are led into the reality of this word of examination, examine what you believe about Christ.

So here we come to the end of this passage. I kind of want to keep going but I'm at the end of it. It's just been such a refreshment for me even to preach it and I trust it has been for you too, to look at these things and to see this word of encouragement that God is not trying to hide the reality of your salvation from you, God wants you to know as a true Christian, he wants you to know that you are in Christ and he would encourage you with that reality. A word of exhortation, kind of a warning, avoid the world and consider what

it is that you're living for and what it is that you love. Okay, we all need that, don't we? Then this word of examination that calls us to a deep study of the word of God that we might know Christ, that we might know eternal life in Jesus Christ whom God has sent as those things are equated in the nature of Christ's prayer in John 17.

So beloved, with all of that I trust that God has encouraged you and helped you. Perhaps during the course of this time, you've realized that, you know, maybe you're one of those falsely professing Christians. I was for a long time, said I was a Christian, I really wasn't; said I knew Christ, I hated him. I don't know why I wanted to claim to know him when I didn't back many years ago. But maybe this kind of teaching exposes it to you and the Spirit of God has laid your heart open bare and you say, "I could not possibly be a Christian with all of the things that I love, the things that I do, and my complete indifference to who Christ really was." Well, if the Spirit of God is convicting you, what a wonderful thing that would be. The Spirit of God convicts you and shows you your true condition of being lost to beckon you to that friend of sinners that we've been speaking about all morning long, Jesus Christ the friend of sinners. These things expose you and you say, "I'm undone. I'm lost. I could not possibly know Christ." Well, praise the Lord that clarity is now in your mind and take it that next step further, take it that next step to look up and see Christ with arms open, as it were, from heaven saying, "Come to Me and be saved. Come and drink from the water of life. I will satisfy all of your thirst. I will give new life to those who come to Me." Friend, if that's you, today can be the day of your salvation. Will you come to Christ then? You have every reason to do so. He is the friend of sinners and he will never cast you away.

Let's pray together.

Dear Father, I can only ask You to seal to the true believers the encouragement, the exhortation and the exhortation and the examination of doctrine that this passage has called us to. Seal it to them, Father, and cause them to grow and flourish still more and more in the real knowledge of Jesus Christ. For those upon whose ears these words have fallen and they are not in Christ, Father, may Your Spirit awaken them, may Your Spirit work in them to lead them to Christ, to bring them to a true knowledge of Him. So Father, we commit all of this into the hands of Your omnipotent Spirit and pray that You would work out Your will in the life of each one. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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