

What in the World?

We come this morning to another one of those passages that close attention to detail and definition of meaning is essential lest we end up in one of the two ditches on either side of the Gospel that Bills graphic illustrated for us.

This morning we need a lot of clarification so that we do hear what John is saying and to not mistake it for something he is not, because we can easily mistake these words...

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 of life—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.

Well that is a mouthful in just a few sentences. And these words can be understood to mean many different things and elicit many different responses without clarifying them. So let's ask the question, "What in the world does John mean by this?"

In order to answer this question let's clarify some words and phrases to help us to understand John's message and God's message to us.

The word *love* appears 3 times in the first verse, and the term *world* appears 6 times in these 3 verses. So these terms and the phrases in which they appear are key.

Let's start with the very first phrase. John commands us, "Do not love...". What? What in the world does John mean by "Do not love...?"

This is like a "Thou shalt not" command, yet the verb here is love. You shall not love..."

Isn't love a wonderful thing? A many-splendored thing? Love is what makes the world go around. Isn't love the highest ideal, the loftiest ethic? Faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love? And God is telling us here to not love something?

The key is in the “something”. To love what God forbids is a despicable love, it is an appalling love, a dreadful, contemptible, wicked, shameful love. Of course, what makes it this way is its *object*. Its not love itself that God prohibits, but the love of certain things. There are times that love is just plain wrong, and that is when we love what God prohibits. But we all knew that, didn't we? Most of us are familiar with the verse “Money is the root of all evil.” And many of us know that that is not what the verse actually says. What does it say? “The **love** of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” The love of something is the cause of evil deeds. It is wrong. Why? Because the love of those things supplants our love for God, or are in violation of God's commands to us (and thereby supplants our love for God).

There are some important concepts to remember here, before we discuss the object that John speaks of.

- 1) He is telling *us* to not love. *We* are the *subjects* of the love in all three of these instances. *You*, Christian, do not love the world. If *anyone*, if *any of you* loves the world, Then the love of the father is not in *you*. This will help us understand what in the world John means by, “**the love of the father is not in him.**” The subject is *him*, the guy or gal loving the world. The verb in this phrase is *love* and the object is the Father. **If someone is loving the world they are not loving the father.** This points us back to the illustration from a couple of weeks ago that I just loved because it was such a precise picture of what goes on when we sin. Do you remember that nine-month-old child whose father had told him not to touch the power outlet. And yet the young child the next morning comes down the hallway checks to see if his father is looking and makes a beeline for the power outlet and just before he touches the power outlet looks over his shoulder one more time to make sure his dad is not looking. And what did that show the Father? **That not only did the child understand that he was doing something that he shouldn't, but that he was willing to break relationship with his father in order to do it.** The love of the father was not in him. He was more consumed with what he wanted and dismissed his father and was willing to break that relationship with him. He did not love the father in that moment. He is the subject. It's not that he wasn't *loved by the father*, but was not considering his father and his love for his father when he did this.
- 2) Which leads us to the second point, which is love for these forbidden things and love for God are mutually exclusive. This love is hatred toward God. It is valuing other things above him. Desiring what he has forbidden. Longing for and pursuing, holding in your hearts, those things that diminish his glory. If you love that which God has forbidden and at the same time think you

have love for the father, you fool yourself. It's akin to what Jesus said about the love of money. You will love one and hate the other. You, believer, do not love this. If you love this then you do not possess love for the father at the same time.

So John is saying, do not love this thing, if you love this thing then you are not loving God, your Father, at the same time. If you are consumed with a love for this thing then you are not at that same moment filled with love of the Father.

So what is this thing? **The world.**

What in the world?! God is commanding us to not love the world? Well that seems messed up. If there's one verse I know it's the verse that says, "For God so loved the world. So how come he can love the world and yet he tells me not to love the world?"

What we need to do is to define what John means. What in the *world*?

What in the world does John mean by *world*?

I'm glad you asked. John uses the word "world" or *kosmos* in at least ten different ways in his Gospel and Epistles. Did you hear that? Ten different definitions for the same word!

Here are a few of the ways in which he uses "world".

1. The Created Physical Earth -

Joh 13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father,

So does this mean that we are not to love creation? The created world? The created universe? The heavens declare the glory of God in the earth proclaims the work of his hands? No! This is not the world that John is speaking of.

2. The Whole of Humanity –

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

When it says God loved the world it is speaking of humanity. And we see throughout Scripture that we too are to love all men. Because all men are created in

the image of God and therefore contain dignity and worth. We are to love them because God loves them. And yet also in this verse we see that though he loved the entire world he gave his son for whom? For those that believe in him. So are we to apply this definition to our verse in first John? No. He is not saying do not love those created in his image.

3. All humanity minus believers –

John 7:7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.

Is John telling us then that we ought not to love unbelievers, sinners? Or are we supposed to love them and bring the gospel to them?

4. The Elect from all nations –

1 Jn 2:2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Are we then not supposed to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, the elect from across the earth?

That is a sampling of just John's usage of the term "world". But none of those definitions are actually the definition of the term *world* used here. So what are we to "not love".

As you saw each of these instances, the definition is determined by the context around the word. And so it is here in our passage this morning. What in the world does John mean here?

I believe the best way to word it is *the Godless World System* –

there are many instances throughout Scripture where this idea is communicated thru the term "world". Here are just a few instances...

John 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

Jas 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.*

So what is the *world* that John speaks of? It's the invisible spiritual system of evil.

We often use the term, “world” to mean a system or an order. Like when we talk about the Wide World of Sports, or the world of politics, or the world of science. They are systems made up of beliefs or ideas or philosophies or activities that operate for a certain purpose. In the same way, the term *world* here means a system that is designed around evil, or unrighteousness. A system that is anti-God, whose purpose is to diminish the glory of God. Its not the physical world, or the world of people or the stuff in the physical world, it’s the system of evil that twists these things for evil or wrong.

That is the world that we are not to love. It is that order that is run by Satan, as we see 2 Corinthians 4.

John gives us a brief description of what he means by *world* by describing what is in the world. The *what* in the world.

What are the elements or components of the world? He lists three things. These are the things that encompass loving the godless world system.

1. The Lust of the Flesh –

So what are the lusts of the flesh? We have a pretty thorough list of them in Galatians, so let’s take a brief look there.

Gal 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

That is quite the list, isn’t it? I think most of us immediately think of sexual sins when we hear the term ‘lust of the flesh’. Both the words *lust* and *flesh* tend to communicate that idea. And they certainly are included in this list, aren’t they? Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality. But that is just the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

Idolatry. Sorcery. Concepts covering our worship. Are we giving other things more importance than God or worshiping in a manner detestable to him? Believing in false gods or false concepts of God and calling after those false gods?

Then he gets personal. Enmity. Strife. Jealousy. Ouch.! Fits of anger, rivalries, and dissension, division, envy. Are you kidding me? These are the lusts of the flesh.

Having to do with our relationships not just with God but with others. Our inward thoughts and actions concerning others, and how we treat them.

Oh there's more. Drunkenness and orgies. And then he says, "and things like these". So with all that is encapsulated underneath these categories. For we could list dozens of particular actions that could be described as any of the above lusts of the flesh.

2. The Lust of the Eyes –

The lust of the eyes can be subsumed under the idea of covetousness. It's those things that we desire to have that we do not have. It's the selfish and sinful desires of our heart. The lust of the eyes are the things that make us dissatisfied with God's provision. They could be sexual in nature or not. They are simply things that we covet, that we desire that are not ours. And they replace our passion for God. We dwell on them. They become our idols, our mistresses.

And finally,

3. The Pride of Life

Pride. Pride is simply thinking more of yourself than you ought to. Placing more importance on yourself than is deserved. Having a higher opinion of your opinions than of others'. Giving more recognition to yourself than is merited. It's focusing more on yourself than on others and God. And the greatest form of pride... self-sufficiency.

These are the things in the world that John commands us not to love. These are the things that comprise the godless world system. There are two more descriptive phrases here that need to be mentioned.

- 1) The first note is that he says these things are not from the father but from the world. This is as if to reinforce the point that these are mutually exclusive. You either love the father or you love the world *when you act*. Which tells you something. It tells you that this world which John is referring to, and the other option, loving the father are two systems through which you can interact with the physical world around you, with your world. They are verbs.

I mean, what **he is describing is the system through which you choose to interact with your world**, which is comprised of (among other things) your family, namely your wife and if you have children, then your children. Your job. Your church. The government. And then entertainment, such as art, music, literature, and technology such as video games and social media. The

question is how we choose to interact with our world, which invisible system of ideas we will go through as we engage our reality.

My wife, my job, my money and friends and social media, all of these things can either be a means by which God is glorified or by which God is dishonored. When I dishonor God in my relationship to my wife or to my children or to my coworkers or to my church or to my friends, that is when I have loved the world and the things in the world. And yet when God is glorified in my marriage and my parenting and my work and my relationships, then I have not loved the anti-God system but I have interacted with the things and people of this world according to God's will.

*So he is not here saying do not love my wife, or my children, or my job, or the church. He's not saying to not love physical creation, or arts, or music or technology. No, these are gifts from God. Not at all.

But there is an invisible world through which I interact with all of these things.

2) Secondly, this passage says that these things are temporary and passing away. All of these areas that are part of the world will disappear. All of the temptations from our eyes to our flesh to things that would make us proud, they are temporary and will be burned up. Why does he mention this? Because God is eternal and only the things that we do that honor him will last.

I remember the sign that John Piper says his father had above their door when he was growing up. It read, "Only one life will soon be past only what's done for Christ will last."

Christian, don't waste your life on the things of this world. It's temporary.

Summary

So what John is commanding here is that you and I are not to love this ungodly system or this state of ungodliness, this system which rebels against the laws and principles of God. That raises itself up against the love of God and the person of God. This system that God has forbidden. We are not to walk in a way that gives in to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. They are a constant temptation, ever before us on a daily basis if not an hourly basis. Do not love these things. Do not practice these things. We need to realize is that love for God and love for that which is in the world are mutually exclusive ideas. That is what John is communicating to us. When you are loving the world system you are not loving God. And when you love God you are not loving the world and its ideas and its principles. We can't go through this life thinking that we can love God and walk in

sin at the same time. We cannot pursue the lusts of our flesh and the lusts of our eyes and at the same time be pursuing God.

So we are almost there in understanding and being able to apply this passage. Yet one thing remains, and that is understanding what John has just told us in light of the context of the entirety of this book.

What in the world is John's message?

Because right now we can take these words, this command to not love the world, and do one of two things with it. And if we don't do the correct thing, understand it in light of what the overall message of what the book is about, then we can end up outside of the ring of the gospel and be promoting either lawlessness or else legalism.

I want to first give you the most common way the book is interpreted, and that is that John is giving us tests by which we are to judge whether or not we are Christians, and then base the assurance of our salvation in this.

I am going to tell you right now that I do not believe that this is the correct interpretation and application of this passage and I am going to explain to you why. I'm going to tell you why it is utterly dangerous, destructive and breeds hopelessness if we were to apply the words of John as a test of whether or not we are Christians.

I will use the words of a well-known and highly respected pastor to illustrate,

"Now you remember that John is giving us a series of tests by which Christians can know they're Christians. All you have to do is read what it says and take a look at your life and do a little spiritual inventory and if you match up with the standard, both in terms of doctrinal tests and moral tests, then you can know that you have eternal life. Now we're still sort of talking about the test here because in verse 15 it says, "If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you." So that constitutes a clear delineation. Somebody who loves the world is not a believer, doesn't possess the love of God. John writes it in the form of a command. "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone does that, they're not Christians."

Did anyone else besides me just cringe and doubt whether or not you're a Christian because of what I just read?

Folks, if we are going to use this as a test, then it needs to be a *true inventory* of our actions and thoughts in light of the words of John. John has said that we are not to love the things of this world. So let me ask you, do you ever have any love for any of the things of this world? You need to be real here.

I want to paint a picture for you. This idea is not original, in fact the seed of it came from a conversation that I had with Eric who had heard it from a guy speaking in a podcast who had read it in a book. But the concept resonated deeply with me.

So I want you to imagine that you are called to comfort a friend in the midst of a crisis of assurance. On their deathbed they are examining their works and are despairing of their faith. They express to you their fear that they will not be accepted in heaven because they did not have true faith in Christ. And so what do you do? You run to these words of John, which you believe are meant to be a measuring stick by which you can then assure them that they are in fact saved. So then you turn them to this passage here, verses 15 through 17. And you say...

“My dear friend, your life above all others that I have seen demonstrated a love for God and a hatred for the world. You have been a faithful testimony to Christ, faithful to your wife and your children, loving righteousness and hating evil.”

At this they begin to tremble. *“Oh Jason, if you only knew my heart. How desperately wicked it is and has been. If you only saw into my soul, the wickedness that abounds moment after moment. For all those times that I have demonstrated love for God, there are 100 times that many instances that I have not. If you only knew how many times I have chosen the world above God! Thousands times more. If you only knew the seemingly endless number of times that I loved the world and I loved my flesh and I loved the lust of my eyes and my pride. Sin upon sin that no one besides myself and an all-seeing God saw in my heart. The lack of repentance, the lack of love, the putting of idol upon idol in his place to pursue my own pleasures above pursuing him. How many times I ignored the Council of my brothers and sisters, of my elders and of teachings from the pulpit. Is that not the pride of life? How many times I placed my own opinion as superior above my brothers and sisters. His that not pride to? If you only knew the numerous times that I did not even consider the love of my brothers before I acted and did harm to them because of my thoughtlessness. Is that not enmity and strife? And how very*

often I have been jealous, jealous of you and your life, of others' lives in this congregation, of others riches and wealth. My almost continual coveting of others' things. For every time I loved righteousness, there were 100 that I hated it. And for every time that I hated evil there were 100 times that I loved it first. There is no assurance for me, there is no hope for me."

Do you see what making this a test of your salvation does? If you are going to use these as a test then you need to take **a real** inventory of your life, and honest look at the deepest recesses of your heart and not do a superficial examination of yourself. If your assurance comes by an examination of your works, then you must examine all your works in light of the God of light who is completely righteous and holy. We must examine not just the good deeds that we like to focus on, the times that we did what we should do, but also taking an inventory of every single time that you didn't do what you knew to be right. Every single time that you had the sinful thought, the judgmental thought, that you didn't do what you were supposed to because you were selfish, every time that you were prideful. So does anyone in here struggle with the lust of the flesh? Have you at times indulged your fleshly passions instead of your spiritual ones? Does anyone in here struggle with lust of the eyes? With covetousness and desiring stuff you don't have? And does anyone in here struggle with pride? Is there any pride in your life? If you answered 'No' then you just displayed an exceedingly large amount of pride. If there is anyone in here that doesn't think they struggle daily with pride they deceive themselves.

You see if we believe these words of John are meant to be a measuring stick for us to make the determination of whether or not we are really Christians, then we are back under the yoke of legalism. How many are enough? Really? How many of these works are enough? John says if you love anything of this world the love of the father is not in you. So if that means that you're not a Christian if you have any love for the world or the things of the world, what are we to make of it?

But this is not the context of these verses. These words are injunctions toward walking a life of holiness in light of the God of light in whom you already have assurance. John wants you to be assured so that you **then do** these things. Your assurance is in Christ and what Christ has done, not in your works. And because you have assurance you then ought to live in a way that honors the God who is light, the God who is holy, the God who is good and who is moral and is pure. You

want to reflect him rightly and proclaim his greatness by your words and by your works. You want to make the reputation of the one who saved you a good one and not tarnish it by your works and your words. And so these commands throughout this book and particularly here are meant **to show you how to do this, the path of holiness.**

These instructions and the signs that John is giving us are in fact a matter of sanctification, a path of living out my assurance, a path of esteeming Christ because of what he has done for me. Your sins have been atoned for, therefore do. Your assurance is in Christ and what he has done, Therefore, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Assurance is the foundation of this book. Your adoption is the foundation upon which you then work out your salvation in these ways. And so John's words are erecting this standard of holiness that God is, and that we ought to walk in light of. And so these words are sharp and cutting to our sin and sinful behavior. Why can he be so harsh? Because this is not impacting your assurance. It is resting on the foundation of your assurance and saying because of what Christ has done, you ought to. Because of who Christ is and because you are His' representative... **be ye holy for He is holy!**

So let's put ourselves back in the room of our dying friend who is despairing of their salvation. Who is despairing that their conversion was authentic. And they point to their worldliness, but instead of you pointing at their works, you point them to Christ. And you say...

"I know that you have had much sin in your life, as I have and continue to have. Yet the John says, 'the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.'" And 'he is the propitiation for our sins' and 'everyone who hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure'. Yes, you are a great sinner, but Christ is a great Savior. You might have had love for the world, but Christ did not love the world. You might not have loved God perfectly, but He did love God perfectly. And he laid his life down on your account giving his righteousness and attributing it to you, so that when you fall short, when you do love the world and do not love God well enough, that it is still his righteousness and his love for God and his hatred of the world that is accounted to you on the day of judgment. That is atonement. That is your assurance, in Who Christ is and what Christ has done for you; not in your works.

John writes these things so that you might know that you have eternal life. Our assurance is in Christ and his work, not in our works. And that is how we must understand the words written here. And so we view these commands as having no

effect whatsoever on our justification, but as imperatives, as directives of how we *ought to live because Christ is our assurance.*

And so let's move to the application now that we understand these words.

Therefore, redeemed people of God, *“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 of life—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.

The application is this: do not love this world or anything in it because when you do you are not loving the Father. If you claim to have the love of the father in you and yet at the same time express hatred for him in defying him and doing what he expressly forbids, you are lying. You are like that child who is looking back over his shoulder and is willing to break relationship with his father because he desires something else more. You are loving the world and therefore are not loving the father when you choose to sin.

And so we do the same inventory as we did above, honestly examining our lives to see where any wickedness still exists within us. And we ask the question...

What in my world is being effected by my love for the world?

We spoke of the things in this world. And as I briefly explained them I said that they are really categories under which there can be dozens if not hundreds of specific manifestations of the sinful behavior. Were I to try and list them all we would be here for a very long time and I would still miss many. Not only would I do that but I would improperly list a bunch of things as well and therefore put you under a legalistic spirit once again by trying to make my own list of what in fact is encapsulated in the ideas and concepts that are communicated under the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

And so I will simply want to give you a couple of questions for you to ask yourself as you examine yourself to see which areas in your life that you are loving your Father, and other areas that you are not but are loving the world instead. Again I remind you of these areas: relationships: such as but not limited to marriage, or

singleness, parenting, work relationships, your church and your relationship to those within the church, and with relatives and unbelievers. Entertainment including but not limited to art, music, movies, video games, social media outlets. Gifts given to you by God to glorify Him with, but if we interact with them through a love for the world... can be used to diminish his glory and slander his name.

The Lust of the Flesh -

- What does what you have an appetite for reveal about what you love?
- What areas of your life are you doing things that you know God has forbidden?
- What areas of your life are you not doing what God has commanded?
- What areas of your life are you doing things that, though not specifically forbidden or commanded in Scripture, cause your conscience to do a double-take?
- What areas of your life do you treat with more importance than you do God?

The Lust of the Eyes –

- What does what you look at and how you look at it reveal about what you love?
- Are there things that you are coveting?
- What areas of your life do you find yourself coveting things you do not have rather than rejoicing in what you do have?
- What are they and what do they reveal about what you love?
- Are there things that you are viewing with your eyes or desiring in your heart that God forbids?
- Are there things that you are viewing with your eyes or desiring in your heart that would cause your conscience to do a double-take?

The Pride of Life-

- What areas of your life are manifesting pride?
- In what areas do you exalt your opinion, your status, or yourself above others?
- What does that pride tell you about what you love?
- If you do not believe that you have areas of pride in your life, are you willing to admit that you are self-deceived and ask God to reveal your areas of pride to you?

So, how do we eradicate love for the world? John tells us that too. And in a very simple way. What is that? Doing the will of God.

Well gee, isn't that just easy? Those who do the will of God will abide forever.

You who pursue the will of God will abide in him, you will draw near to him and

have deep intimate fellowship with him. That is where the love of the Father is, in loving things as God directs, in pursuing righteousness, in obeying his commands, and walking in his ways, loving what he loves, hating what he hates and loving Him above all else.

1Jn 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

Come before your God and ask him to sanctify your heart. Ask yourself these tough questions. Examine every area of your life to see where love of the world is infringing upon your love for God. Seek God's will. How many of us regularly ask the question, "what is God's will in this area?" In everything. Not just a decision as to whether to move to this place or take a new job. But in those areas where you have conflict, or struggle. Do you ask, "What is God's will?" When you do things do you consider God's Word and instructions? Especially those here in first John? Do you consider your brothers and sisters in Christ and what is loving for them when you act? Do you let love for them and for God dictate how you act in both the public and private spheres? And what about interacting with your spouse? Do you know what God's will is concerning this relationship? What he has commanded, what he has forbidden? What his will is specifically stated in the precepts of Scripture? And for your children and your parenting? And for video games? Or movies? Or music? What is it that God enjoins you to do? What is his will in these areas? What do the Scriptures teach?

And do you know the Scriptures well enough to even know what the will of God might be? Do you search the Scriptures daily to learn more about who God is and what he requires of you as a believer? Among them are these things listed in first John, that we are to walk in such a way that honors him because we have assurance in Christ. Do we know what those ways are, and the myriad other ways listed in Scripture? Do we have an understanding of the nature of God and those laws and moral characteristics that flow from him and are essential to him? The God of light. So that we might reflect that glorious righteousness and be a pure reflection and testimony of the God who has saved us. Did you catch that last sentence? It has hopefully permeated this sermon, but it is out of our assurance, out of what Christ has done for us and who He is; that is our motivation. To treasure him and glorify him and reflect his glory and represent him well, to make His name glorious.