

INTRODUCTION

At the end of our study last week, I asked, "Is there a difference in your life between Christian and worldly conduct?"

Or "have the lines between Christian and worldly conduct in your life become so indistinguishable that there really is no difference at all?"

Last time we looked at two specific passages of Scripture: 1 John 2:15 and 2 Timothy 4:10.

In 1 John 2:15 we heard the deserter's warning: "Do not love the world."

In 2 Timothy 4:10 we saw an example of one who deserted.

His name was Demas.

According to 2 Timothy 4:10 he "loved this present world" and "deserted" Paul and left for Thessalonica."

But he didn't just abandon Paul, he also abandoned his relationship to Jesus Christ.

And we asked, "What causes a person to abandon Christ?"

We noted that it wasn't immediate or obvious at first.

Demas didn't go from disciple to deserter in a day.

No, it was a gradual weakening.

It was a subtle contaminating which led to an eventual conforming to this world.

He abandoned Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:2 to not be conformed to this world.

And now sin did not grieve him like it once did.

His passion for the Savior cooled.

His affections grew dim.

His excitement lessened for the work.

His eagerness for evangelism waned.

His growth in godliness slowed to a crawl until he finally left.

John said in 1 John 2:19, "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."

Now before we look more closely at our passage in 1 John, we need to understand that this isn't simply a "Do Not Enter" sign.

Nor does it simply forbid worldliness, but it points the way to Christ.

It helps us see the pathway to what John Newton called "solid joys and lasting treasures."

So for us to understand this passage, we must first understand the nature of the warnings.

First, they are not legalistic restrictions from an irritated God who doesn't want us to enjoy ourselves.

Second, they are not relics of a bygone era, irrelevant for us today.

No, these warnings are expressions of God's mercy and wisdom that have been given for our good, to protect us from sin and its consequences.

So as we look at this text this morning, let's begin in 1 John 2:15 by first...

Defining Our Terms

Love

When John says, "Do not *love* the world," he is talking about a kind of "love" that signifies affection and devotion.

God, not the world, must have the first place in the Christian's life.

Matthew 10:37-39 says, "He who *loves* father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who *loves* son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."

God is to be supreme in your life.

He is to have first place.

That leads us to our second term...

World

What does John mean when he speaks of the "world"?

The term for world is kosmos.

It occurs 22 times in 1 John.

6 of the 22 times occurs in 1 John 2:15-17 (3 times in v.15, 2 times in v.16, 1 time in v.17).

It is used in 3 different ways in Scripture...

First it is used to speak of...

The Physical World

Acts 17:4 says, "God...made the *world* (kosmos) and all things in it."

We know John is not referring to the physical world because God created the world and declared it "very good" (Gen.1:31).

The second use of this term is in reference to...

The Human Race

1 John 4:14 says, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the *world*."

We know John's not referring to the human race either because Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the *world*, and *those* who dwell in it."

That leaves us then to the third use of this word...

The Evil System

Ephesians 2:1-2 says, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this *world*, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."

Kenneth Wuest says, "Kosmos refers to an ordered system. Here it is the ordered system of which Satan is the head, his fallen angels and demons are his emissaries, and the unsaved of the human race are his subjects, together with those purposes, pursuits, pleasures, practices, and places where God is not wanted. Much in this world-system is religious, cultured, refined, and intellectual. But it is anti-God and anti-Christ" (Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader: 1 John 2:15).

This, as E.M. Bounds, says, is the sensuous harlot with her snares of death and hell" (Winning the Invisible War, 26).

C.J. Mahaney says, "The world we're not to love is the organized system of human civilization that is actively hostile to God and alienated from God. The world God forbids us to love is the fallen world. Humanity at enmity with God. A world of arrogant, self-sufficient people seeking to exist apart from God and living in opposition to God. It's a world richly deserving of the righteous wrath of a holy God. Dead set against the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the world we're forbidden to love.

While remaining in the world, we're not to become like the world.

In the words of John Stott, we must be "neither conformed to [the world] nor contaminated by it."

But this sinful, fallen world is right in our face.

Our affluent and technologically advanced society brings the world to our doorstep, into our homes, into our very presence.

It baits our eyes and tickles our ears.

We're saturated with media—bombarded by images on television and movie screens, and by music on our iPods.

We have unlimited access—text messages on our cell phones, and Internet access on our laptops and hand-held devices.

We enjoy countless options in clothes to wear, cars to buy, vacations to take, entertainment to view, music to listen to.

And obviously, while these things are not inherently evil, so often they're vehicles of a fallen world.

They deliver endless opportunities to pursue pleasure without regard to God and his Word, endless opportunities to be seduced by this fallen world, to succumb to the sin of worldliness.

Every moment of every day we're making choices---whether we realize it or not---between love for a world that opposes God and love for the risen Christ" (Worldliness, 26-7).

Now that we have defined what John means when he says, "Do not love the *world*," now let's...

Define Worldliness

Simply stated, worldliness is a love for this fallen world.

It's loving the values and pursuits of the world that stand opposed to God.

More specifically, it is to gratify and exalt oneself to the exclusion of God.

It rejects God's rule and replaces it with our own (like creating our own Bibles).

It exalts our opinions above God's truth.

It elevates our sinful desires for the things of this fallen world above God's commands and purposes.

Joel Beeke says the goal of worldly people "is to move forward rather than upward, to live horizontally rather

than vertically. They seek after outward prosperity rather than holiness. They burst with selfish desires rather than heartfelt supplications. If they do not deny God, they ignore and forget Him, or else they use Him only for their selfish ends. Worldliness . . . is human nature without God."

Iain Murray adds, "Worldliness is departing from God. It is a man-centered way of thinking; it proposes objectives which demand no radical breach with man's fallen nature; it judges the importance of things by the present and material results; it weighs success by numbers; it covets human esteem and wants no unpopularity; it knows no truth for which it is worth suffering; it declines to be "a fool for Christ's sake". Worldliness is the mind-set of the unregenerate. It adopts idols and is at war with God."

Are you worldly?

Has this become your attitude?

You may immediately answer "No" but what dominates your mind?

What stirs your heart?

Do you long for earthly pleasures?

Do you relate to God as if He exists to further your selfish ambitions?

Or are you convinced that you exist to glorify Him?

Worldliness does not consist in outward behavior, though our actions can certainly be an evidence of worldliness within.

Worldliness exists in our hearts.

It is internal.

Notice what John says in 1 John 2:16:

"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."

Notice that John doesn't talk about a certain mode of dress or a certain way of speaking or the kind of music you listen to or the things you possess.

No, the essence of worldliness is in the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does.

He doesn't say, "If you listen to music with a certain beat you're worldly."

He doesn't say, "If you dress in fashionable clothes you're worldly."

He doesn't say, "If you watch movies with a certain rating or indulge in certain luxuries of modern society, surely you must be worldly."

No, he says it has to do with "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life."

David Jackman says, "The worldly characteristics of which this verse speaks are in fact reactions going on inside us, as we contemplate the environment outside."

So, John is drawing our attention to heart issues.

He's calling us to deal with the root issue.

Notice the three characteristics of worldliness in verse 16.

He begins with...

The Lust of the Flesh

The word "lust" (epithelia) refers to a "strong desire" whether it is good or evil.

The NIV translates this phrase as "the cravings of sinful man."

David Powlison, paraphrasing John Calvin, wrote, "The evil in our desires often lies not in what we want, but in the fact that we want it too much."

The "cravings of sinful man" are legitimate desires that have become false gods we worship.

It's wanting too much the things of this fallen world.

Consider this in light of what I said earlier.

You're not worldly because of what you wear or say or what music you listen to.

You're worldly when you give your heart to sinful cravings.

For example, a sinful craving is when a legitimate desire for financial success becomes a silent demand for financial success; an interest in clothes and fashion becomes a preoccupation; love of music morphs into an obsession with the hottest band; or the desire to enjoy a good movie becomes a need to see the latest blockbuster.

There may be nothing wrong with these desires in and of themselves; but when they dominate the landscape of our lives—when we must have them or else!—we've succumbed to idolatry and worldliness. And as Calvin says, our hearts are a perpetual factory of idols.

Consider what Jesus said in Mark 7:21-23, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23 "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

Again the issue is the heart!

Notice the next phrase that John uses in speaking of worldiness...

The Lust of the Eyes

Our hearts may generate sinful cravings, but they can also be aroused by what we see.

The "eyes" (ophthalous) refers to the "channel into the mind and heart" (George Berry, Greek-English Lexicon of the NT).

It is the "instrument of desire."

Marvin Vincent says, "The desire of the eyes does not involve appropriation. It is satisfied with contemplating. It represents a higher type of desire than the desire of the flesh, in that it seeks mental pleasure where the other seeks physical gratification" (Word Studies in the NT).

So the eyes themselves are a precious gift from God.

But they're also windows into our soul, providing opportunities for us not simply to observe but covet.

This doesn't apply just to sexual sin but anything we see that stimulates greed in our souls.

Notice a few examples...

In Genesis 3:6 it says when Eve "*saw* that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the *eyes*, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she *took* from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."

In Joshua 7:21, Achan said, "When I *saw* among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I *coveted* them and *took* them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it."

In 2 Samuel 11:2-4 it says of David, "Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he *saw* a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. 3 So David sent and *inquired* about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 David *sent* messengers and *took* her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house."

So what are you captivated by?

What do you think about most often?

What images have the power to arouse your interest?

C.J. Mahaney says, "If you're more excited about the release of a new movie or video game than about serving in the local church, if you're drawn to people more because of their physical attractiveness or personality than their character, if you're impressed by Hollywood stars or professional athletes regardless of their lack of integrity or morality, then you've been seduced by this fallen world" (Worldliness, 31).

"The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes..." Now consider...

The Boastful Pride of Life

"Boastful pride" (alazonia) is "boasting arrogance."

"It means the braggadocio which exaggerates what it possesses in order to impress other people" (Fritz Rienecker, *The Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 788).

We're so familiar with this temptation.

We find ourselves so easily tempted to take pride in our work, our talents or abilities, our physical appearance, possessions, or accomplishments.

We might be too polite to boast out loud but secretly we revel in what we have and what we've done.

We think we're significant because of our assets and achievements, and we want others to notice.

How do you define yourself?

How does your profile read?

How do you want to be known?

We must not define ourselves by, or boast in, anything we possess or accomplish in this world.

Instead, we should identify with Christ and his definition of greatness, which is humility.

Notice in 1 John 2:17 how John...

Defines the Future of Worldliness

John says, "the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

John makes it clear that the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life doesn't last. They pass away.

So if these things characterize your life, you're pursuing things that won't last.

The things of this world---when compared to pleasing God and eternal life, when informed by an eternal perspective---will be exposed as being worthless.

But there is a future in godliness, and for all who do the will of God.

They, by contrast, will live forever.

Listen to what Warren Wiersbe says as he comments on the contrast John makes in verse 17.

He says, "Spiritual Christians keep themselves "loosely attached" to this world because they live for something far better. They are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14). In Bible times, many believers lived in tents because God did not want them to settle down and feel at home in this world.

John is contrasting two ways of life: a life lived for eternity and a life lived for time. A worldly person lives for the pleasures of the flesh, but a dedicated Christian lives for the joys of the Spirit. A worldly believer lives for what he can see, the lust of the eyes; but a spiritual believer lives for the unseen realities of God (2 Cor. 4:8–18). A worldly minded person lives for the pride of life, the vainglory that appeals to men; but a Christian who does the will of God lives for God's approval. And he "abideth forever." (Bible Exposition Commentary).

CONCLUSION

So which best describes you?

One who loves the world or one who loves Jesus?
It's at this point where we are tempted to not be honest
with ourselves or God.

Let's consider some good advice from F.F. Bruce:

He said, "The effective antidote to worldliness is to
have one's heart so filled with the Father's love that it
has no room for any love that is incompatible with
that."

Let's deal with this today as we prepare to come to the
Lord's Table.

None of us want to hear the following words that were
engraved on a cathedral in Lubeck, Germany, which
said:

Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us.
You call Me Master and obey Me not,
You call Me Light and see Me not,
You call Me the Way and walk Me not,
You call Me Life and live Me not,
You call Me wise and follow Me not,

You call Me Fair and love Me not,
You call Me Rich and ask Me not,
You call Me Eternal and seek Me not,
If I condemn thee, blame Me not.

Let's pray.

(Lord's Supper)