

Love Not The World

1 John 2:15-17

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(1 John 2:15-17 (KJV))

Of all the commands that the Lord gives to us, “love” is the greatest. He has said over and over again in these scriptures and especially within these writing of John, that “love” is, by far, the most important thing that He will ever require of us, first to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and then to love each other, even as Christ loves us and gave Himself for us.

But here, God gives us a command that is equally as strong and demanding, telling us that there are things that we are “not” to love. We are not to “love” this world, nor any of the “things” that are in it. And so that we will not misunderstand His command, He tells us clearly and plainly “why”. It’s because this world is filled with all manner of sinful behavior and activities that surely will lure us into its clutches and corrupt our souls.

And here, God describes the world’s sinful effects as being, “the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” And He tells us clearly and plainly that none of these things will ever come from Him and they should never be allowed to become a part of us.

And may we also be reminded, as we consider these very demanding truths of God, that we must not try to simply rationalize their meanings, but we are to instead always put our full faith and trust in the “unction of the Holy Spirit” to help us in our understanding of them.

In the most quoted verse in these scriptures, John 3:16, we are told that “God loves this world”, that He loved this world so much that He sent His Blessed Son to suffer and to die for it. But yet here, He is telling you and me “not” to love this world.

Thankfully, for those of us who have Christ as our Savior and have His Holy Spirit abiding within us, we are able to understand that there is a real difference between what God calls “the world” in John 3:16 and here, where He tells us to “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

But as we well know, dealing with daily life is still not easy. Unfortunately for us, and even for many very seasoned Christians, we can get confused as we attempt to navigate our way through the fast-paced confusing events and encounters of our day.

I think of the “Parable of the Weeds” given by the Lord Jesus. There, we Christians are described as being “wheat”, a provision of God’s “Bread of Life” to lost and dying souls! But because we are so surrounded by the unbelieving “weeds” in our daily existence in this world, we are continually in danger of being lured and enticed to become like them.

And those “weeds” are ever encroaching into the matters of our daily lives, bringing with them, these sins of, “the lust of the eye”, “the lust of the flesh”, and “the pride of life”, their roots ever intertwining with our roots, tempting and drawing us in, enticing us to join in with them and to go where they go and do what they do.

“Lust of the eyes”, “lust of the flesh” and the “pride of life” are the “three deadliest of sins”. And in them are most all the forms of sin that men and women will ever encounter. And like all sin, each of these sins are unrelenting “predators”, ever coming for us, searching us out, finding us and enticing us to join with them and to become like them. And at least one of these forms of these sins, if not two, or even all three, will, at some given time, fit you and me perfectly.

And the daily “living out” of these behaviors can be seen in most every encounter that we engage in each day. With some people, it will be the more violent forms of sin, that of rape, or incest, even murder. But with others, it might be the quieter, more subtle forms of sin, deception and manipulation. But they are all evil and corrupt and destructive to our souls. Listen to some that are described in the Book of Proverbs.

11. . . they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood, let us ambush the innocent without cause; 12 Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit; 13 We will find all kinds of precious wealth, We will fill our houses with spoil; 14 Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse," (Proverbs 1:10-14 (NASB))

You might say, but I can’t ever recall a time that I have been involved in violent things like those. And maybe you haven’t, but there are many, many people who are devising these very kinds of violent plans even right at this moment.

For other people, their sinful bent is more towards “lust of the flesh”. Listen to these words in Proverbs 7.

18 "Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning; Let us delight ourselves with caresses. 19 "For my husband is not at home, He has gone on a long journey; 20 He has taken a bag of money with him, At the full moon he will come home." 21 With her many persuasions she entices him; With her flattering lips, she seduces him. 22 Suddenly he follows her as an ox goes to the slaughter.
(Proverbs 7:18-22 (NASB))

This kind of "worldly behavior" has always been present in people's hearts, but never before as commonplace as it is in today's culture. This very day, men and women in every workplace, and in every neighborhood, and in every sports bar, are thinking thought and making plans like these. They call it "hooking up". And sadly, when Sunday comes around, many of them will go right on back to church as if nothing wrong had taken place.

Probably the most subtle of these three forms of sin, is the third one mentioned here, the "pride of life". It can be seen from a simplest form, such as the "name brand" emblems on clothes and shoes, to the kinds of cars and trucks we drive, to the neighborhoods we "dream" about living in.

And most of the time, we don't even know when we are violating that sin. In our conversations, we find ourselves insisting that we know all the best restaurants, and our doctor is the best doctor. And we insist that we read the best books and listen to the best music. And we will argue about who the best football players and basketball players are. We seem to need to be the "authority" on every matter that is discussed. We continually try to "one-up" everyone else in a conversation.

All of these "deadly sins", "lust of the eye", "lust of the flesh" and the "pride of life" can be found addressed within the Ten Commandment, but especially so within the tenth commandment.

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's." (Exodus 20:17 (ESV))

I have heard many people say, but I don't "covet" the things other people have, I just want things like they have. And that may be OK, but lust and covetousness is still the foundation of those "three deadliest of sins", and they all will lead us to sure and certain ruin.

And nowhere in the scriptures is the combination of these “three deadly sins” more obvious than in the sinful behavior of David with Bathsheba. You know the story, but may I recount it for us.

There in his palace, as David was enjoying his “pride of life”, privileged to not have to go out to war with his troops, he stayed home. And as happens with idle minds, he began to watch his neighbor’s wife as she sun-bathed on her roof. His watching soon turned to “lust of the eye”, then “lust of the flesh”. And then, the lust turned into sinful sexual relations, causing Bathsheba to conceive and become pregnant. And then, in an attempt to cover up his sins, David resorted to having Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, murdered. The perfect combination of these “deadliest of sins”!

Unfortunately, for each of us, these same cascading effects can quickly begin to descend upon us the very moment we step out from under God’s protective Hand.

May I read these words of our passage again for us . . .

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man 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 pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. (1 John 2:15-17 (KJV))

The most difficult truth that is spoken in these verses is the one that we have been studying for the past several weeks. It’s in the words, “If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

Unfortunately for us, our “sin bent” rationale seems to always try to figure ways in which we can have our Christianity but also keep our sinful behavior, our “lust of the eye, lust of the flesh, and pride of life”. But God really is clear in these words.

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These words are not new to us. We have been studying them over and over again over the past few weeks. Listen to these words from 1st John 1!

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:5-7 (ESV))

Folks, all throughout these scriptures, God gives us indicators and “litmus tests” that we can use so that we can know for sure if we are abiding in His Will, and here, to tell us clearly when we are not. If we walk in His light, then we have fellowship with one another and with Him. But if we walk in the darkness of this world, and if we love this world and its ways, its lust of the eye, its lust of the flesh and its pride of life, then “the love of the Father really is not in us”!

What a terrifying thought, especially for those of us who are devout churchgoers. Think about it folks! Many devout churchgoers violate some of the simplest of rules of Christianity, without even realizing that we are doing it. We blindly think that our church involvements and our good works and our mission trips and our tithing will in some way wipe away all those “lusts” that lie well-hidden within our hearts.

And yes, we might keep our families and our friends and our fellow churchgoers from knowing about our sinful inclinations. But listen! God does not look on the outward man. He “looks upon the heart”. And He knows all of our inmost secrets. He even knows every thought that we think before it ever comes to our tongue. And He says to us,

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Because we now have been told these truths, you and I are clearly without excuse! So, what then are we to do? How do we combat such formidable enemies as these invisible “deadly sins”?

May I tell you the only strategy that I have ever known to work. It begins with our not focusing our attention and efforts on what we should “not do”, but rather to give our every effort to doing what we know we “should do”. That may sound odd and it is especially contrary to most of the “Christian fix-it” programs and plans being used in most of our churches today.

What do I mean by what I’m suggesting? It begins with the Holy Spirit. . . . The opposite behavior to our “loving the world”, and “lusting” after its ways, is for us to instead be loving and giving towards God and towards other people. But knowing that we usually fall short in our own efforts at such things, we must turn instead to the Holy Spirit.

If we want to have and to do and to show good things, instead of sinful things, we must turn and ask Him. It is in the Holy spirit that the “fruits of the Spirit” live and show themselves, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

But a caution is in order here. Too often, we “good churchgoers” want to jump right into the fray and try our best to emulate all these good “fruits of the Spirit”, only to find out that we are falling short. And there is a simple explanation for our failure. It is because our attempts to use something that is not ours, does not work well. These “fruits of the Spirit” belong only to the Holy Spirit. They are His and His alone, and they can only be demonstrated in us, when He, the Holy Spirit, is fully abiding in us and is actually doing the work.

May I say that again another way, because there is a thin and vague line between “our doing” and “His doing”. The only time we can be sure we are doing the right thing is when we focus our hearts and our efforts on drawing closer to the Spirit of Christ. And it is only as we quit trying to do His job, and truly allow Him to work in and through us that right and good things begin to take place.

Now, how does all this help us in our fight against the influences and the control of the “world, the flesh and the devil”, and against our falling into the sins of “lust of the eye, lust of the flesh and pride of life”? It is as we draw nearer to God, that His purity and His holiness and His righteousness begins to spread out over your and my souls, cleansing us from sin and protecting us from the influences of the world, the flesh and the devil. And as our thoughts are filled with thoughts of Him, there is little room left for the lusts of the eye, the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life.

I want to repeat what I am saying. The “battle” really does belong to the Lord. Our strength and our success can only come through His power and His strength and His success.

And with that being true, the only real task left for you and me, is to “surrender” and to “draw near” to Christ, every moment of every hour of every day. And, as we do, out from Him will flow rivers of living water that will nourish, first our own souls, and then nourish all those around us. Praise be to God! So then!

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