

1 John 2:15-17

INTRODUCTION: One of the great problems for believers down through the centuries has been worldliness.

In an effort to be “relevant” and reach our culture, there is the very real danger that we will become just like the culture and lose our distinctiveness.

The apostle Paul warned of the danger in Romans 12:2, when he wrote, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind....”

J. B. Phillips (*The New Testament in Modern English* [Geoffrey Bles], p. 332) paraphrases it, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your lives from within.”

I would argue that with the pervasive influence of modern media, the tug of the world is greater now than it ever has been.

Daily we are bombarded with attractive people telling us that we can’t be happy unless we own the product that they are selling or adopt the lifestyle that they are pursuing.

We thumb through magazines that lure us with beautiful homes, new cars, luxury items, or expensive vacations that all can be ours, if we just get enough money or go into enough debt.

It is lust for the things of the world that prompts Americans to spend billions on casino gambling and lottery tickets.

Just one lucky hit and you will have it all!

Christian attempts to counter worldliness often have swung to the opposite direction: withdrawal from the world, along with extra rules to reign in the flesh.

This is the method of the monastic movement and of isolationist groups, such as the Amish.

ILLUSTRATION: An extreme example of the ascetic approach was Simon the Stylite (c. 390-459), who lived in extreme austerity for 36 years on top of a platform on a 60-foot pillar.

Thousands of people flocked to see this “unworldly” man and listen to his preaching. I doubt that Simon is a model of what John had in mind when he warned us not to love the world!

Worldliness is, at its core, a matter of the heart. If your heart is captured by the world, you will love the things of the world.

If your heart is captured by the love of God, you will be drawn to Him and to the things of God.

The only way that our hearts can be transformed so that we love God is by the supernatural new birth.

CONTEXT: John wrote this letter to churches that were being influenced by certain heretics and false teaching.

They claimed to have enlightenment but John says they still are in darkness.

They claimed to know God but they were living in sin and disobedience.

They claimed to know the truth but they had no love for God's people.

John gave three tests by which his readers could evaluate these false teachers and by which they could tell whether their own faith was real and authentic.

1. The Test of Obedience 2:3-6
2. The Test of Love 2:7-11

The John pauses in 2:12-14 to give an encouraging word about their spiritual growth and really uses spiritual growth as a test of genuine faith.

You can know your faith is real by the spiritual growth you experience.

John gives another test here in verses 15-17.

3. The Test of Worldliness.

EXPLANATION: Remember John is very “either or” in his approach.

He draws a sharp line with no middle ground.

You are either in the light or in darkness.

Here he is saying:

If you love the world, you do not love the Father.

He shows that: YOU MUST CHOOSE YOUR LOVE AND THEN MAINTAIN YOUR CHOICE:

YOU LOVE EITHER THE WORLD OR THE FATHER, BUT NOT BOTH!

He’s saying the same thing that Jesus said (Luke 16:13), “You cannot serve God and Mammon.”

He did not say, “You *should not* serve God and Mammon,” but, “you *cannot*” serve them both.

You must make a basic decision in life: Will you live to know God and His eternal love, or will you live for this world and its fleeting pleasures?

You can’t take a little of both.

Two Preliminary Considerations:

1. The Command

John starts off giving a very straightforward command.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world...”

QUOTE: Martin Lloyd Jones said of this verse, “There are no more solemn words addressed to Christian people anywhere in Scripture than these...” p. 214

Love not – present imperative – mood of command.

Four moods in Greek – indicative (fact) Subjunctive (probability) Optative (wish) imperative (forceful command)

John is not suggesting that we do not love the world. He is commanding that we do not love the world.

Present tense which means continual action – This indicates that it is an ongoing battle.

“Love” - is “agape” indicating that it is a commitment, not a feeling, that John is commanding.

The only way that you can fight the love of the world is to maintain and grow in your love for the Father.

ILLUSTRATION: The old Scottish preacher, Thomas Chalmers, has a sermon, “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection,” where

he argues that the only thing powerful enough to drive out our love for the world is our new love for the Father.

Some people think you can have one foot in the world and one foot in church. It doesn't work that way.

James 4:4 says "Friendship with the world is enmity with God."

^{ESV} **Matthew 6:24** "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

A LOVE FOR THE WORLD IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH A LOVE FOR THE FATHER!

They are diametrically opposed to one another. It is impossible to love both at the same time.

Jesus described the relationship of the world and the believer when He prayed in John 17

"I have given them thy word and the world hateth them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

It is no more possible for Jesus to love the world and love the Father both at the same time as it is for you.

2. The Test

Here John establishes this as a test of true salvation and assurance.

Here is another Objective means of assurance for salvation.

Do you love the world?

Several times in these first two chapters John has contrasted what a person professes verses the reality of God's Word.

If a man says he has no sin.....truth is not in him

He that says I know him Yet keeps not his commandments.....is a liar

He that says he is in the light, Yet hates his brotheris in darkness

If any loves the world....love of Father not in him

This is a salvation expression! Children of God are those who love God.

If any loves the world it reveals they are not a true believer they are not saved.

^{KJV} **2 Timothy 4:10** For **Demas** hath forsaken me, having loved this present world,

EXPLANATION: This is present tense. Which means a pattern of life.

A true believer can lapse into worldliness but they will not remain there.

They will LAPSE into worldliness but they will not live in continual worldliness.

The default mode of a true believer is love for God and not the world!

TRANSITIONAL SENTENCE: I want us to see from our passage three reasons why a true believer does not love the world.

I. THE DEFINITION OF THE WORLD – Because of What the World IS. 2:15

I think that one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted verse in Scripture is verse 15.

People misunderstand and misinterpret the concept of loving the world.

A. What it is NOT.

1. Not talking about the earth.

This is not a reference to the physical planet where we live.

My Lord Jesus loved the lilies of the field and drew attention to the beauties of nature, they stirred His own.

He would have His people see in them evidences of the Father's wisdom and love.

The earth and all it's fullness was given by God to mankind as a gift to enjoy.

It is a token of His love and goodness.

Psalm 33:5 says "The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD"

2. It is not talking about the people.

God is not talking about the people in the world.

God does not want us to hate people, on the contrary we above all should be showing the love of Christ.

John 3:16 – tells us that God so loved the world. He was talking about the people.

3. He was not talking about asceticism.

Denying oneself legitimate earthly pleasures.

There are people that have misunderstood this command and have separated themselves.

They have gone completely out of the world and have segmented themselves from society.

Monasticism principle – as if living within the confines of some kind of an institution or order were a guarantee that one would no longer love the world or the things in it.

4. He was not talking about politics.

Did you know there are some that say you should not concern yourself in certain political matters.

They say we should not be entangled with worldly affairs such as that.

The Bible promotes being good citizens.

Many completely miss what John is saying here!

B. What it IS.

World – is the Greek word “cosmos.”

It occurs 185 times in the NT. John uses it 105 of those times. So this is a favorite word for John.

The word means an arrangement or order and it came to refer to the universe as the well-ordered ornament of God.

Our word “cosmetics” comes from the word. Applying cosmetics is an attempt to bring order!”

It is where we get our word “cosmopolitan.”

It basically means something that is well arranged.

When John uses the word he is referring to something bad, something evil.

It is an organized system that is opposed to God.

It is an invisible spiritual system of evil design to replace God with things.

IT IS THAT SYSTEM THAT MAN HAS BUILT IN WHICH HE IS TRYING TO MAKE HIMSELF HAPPY WITHOUT GOD.

1. Who is in Charge of this System?

Satan is in charge of this whole system.

Notice 1 John 5:19 – “wickedness” we can actually translate that “wicked one.”

Satan is promoting this whole idea this whole philosophy of replaces God with things.

It is the pursuit of happiness without God, where God is excluded from your way of life.

John says “Love not the world neither the things that are in the world.”

Satan wants us to replace God with things. He suggests we can find happiness in other things.

It is what John warned against in the very last verse of this epistle. 1 John 5:21

Man was created to know God to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. YOU WERE CREATED TO GLORIFY GOD AND ENJOY HIM.

ILLUSTRATION: The Westminster Catechism says, “What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”

God is our true source of happiness!

Satan came along and suggested another way to happiness, a better way without God.

2. Where Worldliness Started.

It started in Garden of Eden when Satan suggested that Adam and Eve didn't need God to be happy, in fact God was holding out on them.

Continued when Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and built a city and there the world really began.

It was a wonderful world he built.

They were exercised in all kinds of arts, sciences, business, pleasure, anything and everything that made them happy without God.

BUT IT ENDED IN CORRUPTION AND VIOLENCE.

God came and swept it away with a flood.

But the principles of the world that caused the corruption and violence before the flood were carried onto the ark in the hearts of Noah's children.

They brought the world into the ark and when the new world was started right after the judgment of the flood they brought the world out of the Ark!

They set it up again.

And under the leadership of a man named Nimrod they built another city Babel with all its things.

They were pursuing happiness without God.

And every since then man has been doing the same thing. He has his "cosmos" without God.

His system without God.

ARGUMENT: Some people when they think of the world think only of corrupt, immoral vices and abominable practices.

But the true is the world could be a business, a hobby, a relationship, an entertainment anything happiness you pursue apart from God without God.

Anything that cools my love for Christ is the world.

—John Wesley¹

William Cowper wrote:

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be
Help me tear it from thy Throne,
And worship only Thee!

I AM RESOLVED NO LONGER TO LINGER
CHARMED BY THE WORLD'S DELIGHTS
THINGS THAT ARE HIGHER THINGS THAT ARE NOBLER
THESE HAVE ALLURED MY SIGHT.

I WILL HASTEN TO HIM
HASTEN SO GLAD AND FREE
JESUS GREATEST HIGHEST I WILL COME TO THEE

A true believer will not be seduced by the riches of the world.

A true believer will always choose Christ over the world.

¹Tan, P. L. 1996, c1979. *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : [a treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers]*. Bible Communications: Garland TX

I. THE DEFINITION OF THE WORLD – Because of What the World IS. 2:15

Also:

II. THE DEVICES OF THE WORLD – Because of What the World DOES. 2:16

Here John shows us how the world seeks to seduce people.

Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

John Trapp the Puritan wrote:

“Pleasure, profit, and preferment are the worldling’s trinity.”

What are these devices that Satan uses?

A. Lust of the Flesh.

Greek word for lust “epithumia” strong desire or passion.

Flesh – refers to the sin nature or desires of the body.

ILLUSTRATION: The world offers you all that your flesh or heart might desire.

The world says I can give you the things you really desire. You don’t need God. I can give you all you want.

What if you had the ability to get all that your heart desired not matter what it was, no matter how much it may cost you.

To be able to fulfill the lust of the flesh is one third of the world.

B. The Lust of the Eyes.

This is more of an outward source. The lust of flesh is inward desires.

The lust of the eyes is outward allurements.

The world holds things up to us for us to behold and says this can be yours.

ILLUSTRATION: What if whatever you saw with your eyes and you wanted you had the ability to get it.

You withheld nothing from you that when you saw it you got it.

What if you were able to enter into an expensive department store and everything you saw you could get?

You would have another third of the world.

C. Pride of Life.

This is the boasting of what a man has achieved.

It is laudable ambition that turns into pride that glories in no so much in doing well as in being better than one's fellows.

The pride of achievement making one feel as if they were better than others.

The desire for position, prestige, power, and preferment.

ILLUSTRATION: Let just suppose you had the ability to accomplish any and every goal you set before you no matter how hard.

You were able to achieve any dream and aspiration for position or power and you excelled more than anyone else around you in those fields.

You would have another third of the world.

The world says to you I can make you somebody!

I can give you position and power and you don't need God to do this.

In fact God is trying to keep you down.

Satan has been using these devices since the Garden of Eden to get man to pursue happiness without God.

ILLUSTRATION: Adam and Eve in the Garden

^{ESV} **Genesis 3:6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Satan appealed to her desire for food – Lust of flesh
Satan appealed to desire for something attractive – lust of eyes.
Satan appealed to her desire to be wise – pride of life.

ILLUSTRATED: Where the first Adam failed the last Adam succeeded.

Satan used the same approach with Jesus.

He appealed to the Lord's humanity – his hunger for food – take these stones and make them bread.

His eyes – he took him to a high mountain and flashed the world before his eyes.

His perceived pride – jump off the temple so the Father will save you and let everyone know you are God.

But Jesus refuted each of these things by quoting the Scripture as our model on how to deal with Satan and his seduction.

ARGUMENT: Someone may be sitting here and thinking. Wait a minute.

If I could have all of that, all my heart desired, all my eyes saw, all the position, power, and prestige the world could offer I would be a happy person.

The only person who would know that for sure would be the person who had all that.

So, let's look at the testimony of someone who did.

Turn to Ecclesiastes 2

Ecclesiastes is the journal of a man who was looking for happiness apart from God.

He was living a secular life that excluded God.

That is what Solomon meant by “under the sun.”

His perspective was earthly, worldly, without eternity in view.

The book of Ecclesiastes is a journal about life.

It is the observations of the wise king of Israel. If we look closely we can learn from Solomon.

Solomon wrote the book of Song of Solomon as a young man.

He wrote Proverbs as a middle aged man, a father imparting wisdom to his son.

He wrote Ecclesiastes as an old man looking in the rear view mirror of life.

Ecclesiastes is a book about how Solomon got spun around and confused and for a time ran in the wrong direction.

As you read Ecclesiastes you will find that Solomon had it all. POWER, POPULARITY, PRESTIGE, PLEASURE

He learned to earn a living but he forgot how to live a life

IN THIS JOURNAL SOLOMON SHOWS US THE MISTAKES HE MADE AND THE LESSONS HE LEARNED.

ILLUSTRATION: Someone said, “You need to learn from the mistakes of others cause you don’t have time to make the same ones.”

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2 is the record of an experiment that Solomon conducted with his own heart.

Notice v. 1 – Solomon says to his heart I will test you with pleasure.

In other words, I will try all the pleasures that the world has to offer and see if that brings me happiness and satisfaction.

Talk about Self-Indulgence

2:4-10. In his inquiry into the value of pleasure he denied himself no avenue through which pleasure might be gained.

As the richest and most powerful man who had ever lived in **Jerusalem** (v. 9; cf. 1 Kings 10),

he surrounded himself with pleasurable objects such as magnificent buildings and **vineyards** (Ecc. 2:4; cf. 1 Kings 7:1-11),

luxuriant **gardens and parks** (Ecc. 2:5) filled with **trees** (vv. 5-6),

a great retinue of **slaves** (v. 7; cf. 1 Kings 10:5) who were available to serve him, musicians to meet his aesthetic needs, and a large **harem** (Ecc. 2:8; cf. 1 Kings 11:1-3) to satisfy his physical desires.

Moreover, with the wealth from his great **herds and flocks** (Ecc. 2:7) and his great treasures of **silver and gold** (v. 8; cf. 1 Kings 10:14-15, 27) he could buy anything his heart **desired** and indulge in every **pleasure** (Ecc. 2:10).²

Solomon was able to completely fulfill:

v. verse

cf. *confer*, compare

vv. verses

²Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures*. Victor Books: Wheaton, IL

1. The Lust of the Flesh – 2:10 “I withheld not my heart from any joy...”

Solomon said whatever my heart desired I got it!

2. Lust of the Eyes – 2:10 “And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them...”

Whatever my eyes saw that I wanted I got it!

3. Pride of Life – 2:9 “So I great and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem...”

You say “Wow what a life! He must have been the happiest man that ever lived!”

Notice v. 11 – vanity is the Hebrew word “hebel” it means emptiness.

It is what is left when a bubble bursts. Nothing

“vexation of spirit” – I think there is a word play here in Hebrew “re- ut ru-ach” Literally “striving after the wind, chasing the wind.”

Useless.

If you want an empty useless existence just live for the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and pride of life.

Notice v. 17 – “Therefore I hated life...”

Do you know why Solomon hated life? Because he believed the lie that the world could make him happy.

He felt like the things of the world could satisfy him. They can't.

ILLUSTRATION: That's why it does not surprise me to hear of people who have all the world can offer taking their own life because they have no happiness, they are empty, hallow.

You were created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!

Look in Chapter 3:11

Someone may look at this and say here God made us to enjoy the world because He put the world in our hearts.

NO – the word world in Hebrew is ~l'[oh'-ta,
Ha –loam – literally eternity or the eternal.

People have a longing or desire to know the extra-temporal significance of themselves and their deeds or activities. ³

People want to know what significance their life has beyond this temporal world.

Again, it is to know God and enjoy Him.

³Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures*. Victor Books: Wheaton, IL

Your heart can't be satisfied with temporal earthly things because it was created to have fellowship with God and until you know God, you never have fulfillment in this life.

The World and the things of the world offer themselves as a cheap substitute for God.

That is why a Christian does not love the world.

I. THE DEFINITION OF THE WORLD – Because of What the World IS. 2:15

II. THE DEVICES OF THE WORLD – Because of What the World DOES. 2:16

Finally:

III. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WORLD – Because of Where the World is GOING. 2:17

A. The Passing Nature of the World

The words "passeth away" (Gk. paragetai) are in the present tense and imply that the world is continuing to disintegrate.

It is in the process of dissolution.

We often wonder now how much longer our civilization can last.

The world is going to self-destruct because sin produces death.

The world is a dying system.

All its institutions are crumbling little by little--the family, the judicial system, the government.

Everything is breaking down because the world is plagued by sin, which operates on a death principle.

1. The process of deterioration

a) 2 Thessalonians 2:7--"The mystery of iniquity doth already work."

Evil is getting worse to a degree that man never knew before.

b) 2 Timothy 3:13--"Evil men and seducers shall become worse and worse."

B. The Permanent Nature of the Will of God.

Verse 17 presents a stark contrast: "And the world passeth away, and the lust of it; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

It is the Christian who does the will of God. What is God's will?

1 Timothy 2:3-4 tells us that "God, our Savior,... will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

God's will is that people be saved.

Those who are saved will abide forever, but the world and its followers will pass away.

We can't love the world because of its destiny.

We are eternal and it is passing.

The two principles of life and death can't operate together.

The church is an eternally living people; the world is a dead system.

The world is in the process of destroying itself. Believers are citizens of an eternal Kingdom (Phil. 3:20).

Therefore, we should not attach ourselves to the world's decaying system. Christians do not love the world, which is passing away.

We belong to a different dimension. We live in "heavenly places" (Eph. 2:6).

ILLUSTRATION: When I was in Israel back in June, one of the places I visited with Archaeologist Scott Stripling was the city of Jericho.

Most people don't realize there are three Jerichos. There is the Jericho of the OT in Joshua, where the walls came down.

There is the Jericho of the NT, where Jesus visited and stayed before going up to Jerusalem for the Final Week.

Then there is the modern day city.

We were visiting the Jericho of the NT. In that place Herod the Great, build a magnificent palace. It was a winter residence for him.

Herod was a builder and he build many magnificent structures.

So we went to that magnificent palace that Herod built in Jericho.

Guess what it is not so magnificent anymore. It is in ruins. It is a heap of stones.

But standing there in the palace ruins you can look up and see what it called the Mt. of Temptation.

This is the place where Satan tempted Jesus. It is recorded in Matthew 4.

Matthew 4:8 – “And the devil taketh him to an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.”

You can see that very mountain and spot where Satan took Jesus standing there in the palace of Herod.

So Jesus could look down and see this immaculate, beautiful, palace, the glory of Herod's Kingdom.

Then you can look for miles and see Roman structures as well.

That is what Satan showed Jesus. I was standing in one of the places Jesus looked down on a saw, Herod's palace.

In Jesus day it was glorious.

What did Satan say to Jesus?

v. 9 – “All these things I will give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”

What was Satan saying – I will give you the world. You don't have to do the will of God the Father.

By pass that, I will give you the world.

Here is the choice for Jesus. He can have the world immediately – right then and there.

He didn't have to do the will of the Father.

So He had the world on one side and the will of God on the other.

What did Jesus say to Satan!

4:10 – Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence . . .”

My translation – “Hit the road Satan, get out of here . . .”

It is written you shall worship God only . . .

Jesus illustrates this truth in 1 John 2:17 – The world is passing away and the lust thereof.

He who does the will of God abides forever.

Here I was standing in the ruins of that glorious palace . . . That thing that Satan offered. It’s gone – It passed away.

In fact, now it is a trash heap. The stench of garbage in that place is unbearable.

That once glorious palace is a dump now, because the locals come and they dump their trash there!

It was a reminder to me that the world is passing away.

What Satan offers you as a replacement for doing God’s will is garbage!

ILLUSTRATION: Robinson Wanted Not A Thing

Bud Robinson, the well-known Holiness preacher, was taken by friends to New York and shown around the city. That night in his prayers he said, “Lord, I thank You for letting me see all the

sights of New York. And I thank You most of all that I didn't see a thing that I wanted!"

Blessed is the man who can sit loose to the charms of this old world, independent of them because he doesn't want them. ⁴

Take the World but give me Jesus

CONCLUSIONS: But a true Christian is not going to love the world

Because of What the World IS. 2:15

Because of What the World DOES. 2:16

Because of Where the World is GOING. 2:17

So ask yourself where do you stand?

Here are a few questions to ask yourself, to evaluate whether you love the world or the Father (adapted from A. W. Pink, *Exposition of 1 John* [Associated Authors and Publishers], p. 126):

- Which do you seek with more fervor: the wealth and honors of the world, or the riches of grace and the approval of God?
- Which have the greater attraction: the pleasures of the world, which are only for a season, or those pleasures at God's right hand, which are for eternity?

⁴Tan, P. L. 1996, c1979. *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : [a treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers]*. Bible Communications: Garland TX

- Wherein lies your confidence: in the money you have in your bank account or investments, or in the living and faithful God, who has promised to supply all your needs?
- Which causes the deeper sorrow: a temporal loss, or a break in your fellowship with God?
- Upon which do you get more joy: spending money for personal comforts and luxuries, or spending money to further the gospel?
- What most dominates your mind: thoughts and schemes after worldly advancements, or resolutions and efforts to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord?

Some of you need to make the basic choice: Will you love the Father, or will you love the world?

Most of us have made that choice, but we need to maintain it.

Do not yield to the temptations of the world, but do the will of God. You will abide forever!