

## Love Not the World

### 1 John 2:15-17

**February 9 & 10, 2013**  
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We had something special around here this past week. For a couple years, the NWI Symphony has used our auditorium for concerts. This past Friday's concert featured a violinist concerto played on a Stradivarius. This particular Stradivarius is valued at between \$5-10 million. You may not realize that Pastor Gary Butler is quite a violinist himself so we pulled some strings and this is what happened...Follow this link and fast forward to 1:50: <http://bethelweb.org/media/messages/love-not-the-world/>.

The concert violinist was standing there, and when Gary was done, asked him the name of the piece Gary had played. Gary replied, the name of the piece is "I'm Not Worthy."

Stradivarius violins are treasured all over the world and viewed as the finest violins ever made. At \$10 million, the world obviously values them highly.

We live in a world that has a value set, a perspective on things, desires and cravings, which may be slightly different across cultures, but generally are the same because they come from the same place, the human heart. God made our hearts with intense longings for himself. Only great longings befit such a glorious and infinite God. Clearly something has gone very wrong. We are a world of humans made to crave and long and seek satisfaction in God yet the world doesn't think God is a worthy satisfaction. God is not the goal of our longings. Here's how Paul describes what happened in Romans 1:

*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools... Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:21-22, 24-25 ESV)*

A lie? There is a deception at work in the world. What is it? Created things are to be worshipped and valued as ultimate, not God. The lie figuratively turns the world upside down. What isn't really worth much is highly valued. What is really valuable isn't worth much, which leaves the world craving and longing and lusting as it seeks more and more things that can't and won't satisfy. Like salt water, the more you drink, the thirstier you are. That is the world we live in.

The Apostle John's concern is not the world but the church. What about someone who says they are a Christian but lives, loves, longs, lusts just like the world?

*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. (1 John 2:15-17)*

Many people read this as an indictment on the world, and in a way it is. John's concern is not the heart of the world but the heart of the Christian. The issue he is addressing is not

out there but in here (the heart). As in all things, the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart. Here we have another test or evidence of genuine salvation—whether we love God or love the world.

### **What Does John Mean by “World”?**

John uses “world” in different ways in this letter and in his gospel. Context determines the meaning. For example, 1) famously John 3:16 says, *God so loved the world*. Clearly this means mankind; people. 2) John 1:10 says that Jesus made the world. This refers to the created order: the earth and sun and universe and atoms. We are encouraged to enjoy this world God has made and do so with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 6:17), eating and drinking to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). God created this world and called it very good and godly Christians enjoy God’s created sensory pleasures for God’s sake. Don’t hate this world; enjoy it. None of those are what John is talking about here with “world.”

“World” in 1 John 2:15 is the world as an entire system set against God, determined to live without him, running after satisfaction in created things rather than their Creator. C.J. Mahaney calls it, “The organized system of human civilization that is actively hostile to God and alienated from God.” (C.J. Mahaney, *Worldliness*, p. 26.). Joel Beeke describes it this way:

“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.” (Joel Beeke, as quoted in *Worldliness*, ed. C.J. Mahaney, p. 27)

The challenge here is like the old wag asking if a fish knows he is wet. The world of 1 John 2:15 is the world we were born into; grew up in. We live every day in this world. It seems so normal to us. What John identifies here as an entire system set against God we call home; normal; acceptable, even comfortable. This way of thinking and looking at things is taught to us as the way the world works and the way things should be, generation after generation. What is life all about? What is success? What should I live for? The world has its own religious answers to this and they don’t include the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So we have to begin by seeing the world around us, NOT as an innocent and cuddly and God-fearing but as an entire world hostile to God and, John writes later, firmly in the grip of the evil one.

### **Love not the World (Values) or the Things in the World (Materialism and Stuff)**

Love not the values of the world and love not the things in the world. Here he is referring to the stuff of this world. One primary value of the world is to find significance in stuff and the accumulation of it. This doesn’t mean it is wrong to have possessions; what is wrong is when the possessions have us. The world tells us to live for this world and this life and the things this world offers. John urges us not to derive our meaning and identity from things in this world.

John is talking about our hearts and what we love. *Do not love...the things in the world*. This is materialism, a perspective on life which determines the worth of things materially and financially. It seeks as much of THIS world as it can have. Again, this doesn’t mean you don’t have things, it means those things don’t have you. The materialist places a price tag

on everything. The goal in life is the accumulation of stuff or money that can buy that stuff. All that matters is this world and this life.

This is easier to see in other people. We get around the guy who wants to do nothing but talk about his money and his trips and his successes and we think, "That guy is so self-centered; so materialistic! I can't stand him!" Then we drive by his house and resent him for having it or we see him in his nice car and we envy him for having it or someone close to us has a big windfall or apparent success that is more than our own—they have more of this world than we do—and the feelings that erupt in us show that we are living by the same values as the materialist. He has things and we resent him for having them. Both are looking at the world and creating self-identity by what we have compared to others. To this Jesus says, "*one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions* (Luke 12:15).

We see how the envies and rivalries and the constant internal comparisons and the keeping up with the Joneses and the need to win are all examples of loving and living for this world. The world is a system. Live for here. Live for stuff. This world and this life are ultimate. All there is. All that matters. There's no God. No eternity. No accountability. No judgment.

Imagine what John would have said about last week's Super Bowl broadcast. "Apostle John, thanks for coming to our Super Bowl party. Snacks are on the counter. We wondered if you would watch the Super Bowl and give us the apostles' perspective. More of the world will watch this than anything else in history...tell us what you see." So the Apostle John watches the commercials and thinks, *Possessions are really important*. He watches the obsession over the game and thinks, in this culture, *Games and winning are really important*. He watches Beyoncé gyrate (or maybe turns away for that) and says, in this culture, *Sexuality outside of marriage is really important*. When the game is over, you turn to him and ask him, "Well, John, tell us, what do you think about the Super Bowl?" What would he say? I suspect he would say, "I'm only a visitor but after the watching the whole thing, *I suspect your world is very sad*." As you watched the Super Bowl last week, did you discern what it was really all about?

## **Why Lovers of God Won't be Lovers of the World**

### **These loves are incompatible**

*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. (1 John 2:15)*

John sets out two loves: love of the world (hostile to God and determined to live without him) and love for God. To love one requires a buy-in and embracing of a set of values and perspectives that makes loving the other impossible. If I love God, then he is my ultimate and the goal of my life is to worship and please him. If I love the world, then the world is my ultimate and the goal of my life is to find my meaning and purpose in what this world has to offer.

It is impossible to love both. This is why loving the world is yet another test of genuine salvation because we cannot love God and love this world. Jesus said the same, "*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.* (Matthew 6:24) He doesn't say money and God are incompatible; it is the *love* of God and money that are fundamentally opposed to each other. You can't love both.

It is like saying I love cats and dogs. I love war and peace. I love Democrats and Republicans. I love the Sox and the Cubs. I love Ford and Chevy trucks. I love Socialism and Capitalism. I love Purdue and IU. I love the Bears and the Packers.

Everyone gets it. Do you get that we cannot love light and darkness; sin and righteousness; the values of Satan and the teachings of Jesus? God *and* sin. God *and* my possessions. God *and* the admiration of others. God *and* financial security. God *and* sex. We cannot love God *and* anything in this world that is not God.

When I say I love the Father but in my heart I am actually treasuring an entire system of values that hates God, my claims to love God ring hollow. They are empty. I can't be genuinely saved without loving God and I cannot love God and love what hates God. I will either love one or the other but never both.

Let's just pause for a moment. This is more than simply an interesting thought. John is stepping on our toes here in the wealthiest country in the history of the world and the wealthiest churches in the history of the world and the wealthiest Christians in the history of the world. Who do we really love? The answer to that is seen plainly in what we think about, where we put our money, and where our dreams and ambitions lead us.

I need to tie up a loose thread here because I don't want anyone taking deep breaths and straining to try and self-produce love for God so they go to heaven. This evidence, like the others we have seen, is a byproduct of God's work in us. John will say this later and it answers the question, where does this fidelity and love for God as my ultimate come from?

*We love because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:19) This love for God doesn't start with us; it starts with God. He opens the eyes of our hearts to know him through faith in his son Jesus. God's love in us reciprocates with love from us to God.

We naturally love the world. Our flesh delights in it. We love to feel self-important based on our achievements in the world. Salvation changes our loves. God works in our hearts through regeneration so that we are born again. We come alive; alive to faith in Jesus. Alive to love from God. Alive with love for God.

For your encouragement, I received an email this week:

*Good morning Pastor Steve,*

*I thought you might like to know about a gal in my CR group. She has been trying to figure out a great many things in her life and felt like there were pieces of this puzzle that weren't even on the table...until Sunday. She was sitting in the service and heard the simplicity of the gospel and it all finally made sense to her! She told me she started crying and told God that she was a sinner and believed that He had done all for her that He said He had done. She said she wasn't sure what had happened but that she truly believed ! As we talked about her coming to saving faith in Jesus, the light in her eyes shone so brightly! She is such a precious gal...Praising God big time!*

What happens when we experience salvation? Our eyes see through and past the temporary and fleeting trinkets in this world to eternal values and treasures. This life and the next life take on new meaning. In my heart, I exchange loves. My love and self-identity in this world are usurped by a new love for God. It is a revolution of the soul. A revolution begun by God.

Has that revolution happened in your heart? Do you love the world or the Father? From which are you finding meaning and identity? Which is the real passion and goal of your life?

In a future message, we will see the two other reasons NOT to love the world, but here are...

## **Two Important Implications of Not Loving the World**

### **The battle with world-love does not end at salvation, it begins there**

Before God's love is in us, all we have is love for the world and self. There's no battle as there is no adversary to self-love. It is after I am saved that the real battle begins. We fight it all our Christian lives.

"Worldliness does not, at first, talk to you about *bad* things. It just talks to you about...things. And slowly, the eyes of your heart will become heavy, they will start to close, and eventually you will fall asleep. You'll stop reading the Bible, stop praying, stop evangelizing, and keep your Christian friendships at the surface. Then, when weeks habitually pass with nary a thought of God, even as you move your mouth to praise songs at church, worldliness makes the decisive move: either it pulls you into drastic sin, like leaving your spouse, or it pulls up the blanket and makes you so comfortable that you don't awake. It's hard to know which strategy is scarier." (Jonathon Leeman, "Creeping Worldliness," <http://www.gospelproject.com/2013/01/creeping-worldliness/>)

### **How do we fight for God-love? Suffocate world-love by stoking God-love**

"When someone sets his affections upon the cross and the love of Christ, he crucifies the world as a dead and undesirable thing. The baits of sin lose their attraction and disappear. Fill your affections with the cross of Christ and you will find no room for sin." (John Owen, as quoted in *Worldliness*, ed. C.J. Mahaney, p. 108)

Society and media and everything around us feed us constant world-love. If we don't realize what is happening, we will most certainly buy into what they are preaching. The key is to squeeze out world-love by filling our hearts with increasing God-love. We fill our hearts with love for God by using the means he has given us—his Spirit, his Word, obedience, confession, transparency with others, corporate and private worship, giving, the church, proclamation of the Word, service, and many other things that are neglected at our own peril.

As we stoke our love for God, loving this fleeting world seems increasingly silly and empty. Suffocate the one and stoke the other.

*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.* (1 John 2:15)

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