

## **The Believer and the World**

If you have your Bibles, I'd like for you to turn with me if you would to 1 John, Chapter 2. We're going to be looking today in verses 15 through 17 a message called "The Believer and the World." I'm not sure how you're going to receive this message today. When John wrote this, I'm sure it must have stunned a lot of people the way he was writing it.

Remember, we're in a series together learning about living life with certainty. One of the things that steals away the relationship that we have with God are the things of the world. We are to be in the world, but we're not to be of it. John said, "Do not love the world." If there is anything that is undermining the confidence and the assurance and the vibrancy of Christianity today in the world, it is the world itself. So John writes this letter to be an encouragement. This is what he said in 1 John 2, verse 15:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup>The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Let's pray for a moment.

*Lord, this is a message that I cannot afford to let go in one ear and out the other, and I cannot assume that the world has no hold on me. I want to thank you, God, for the many wonderful followers of Jesus in our church. Whether we gather today in Brentwood or we gather today at our Antioch campus, we are one church among many in the world who lift up the name of Jesus. If the world is to be transformed, the world must become more like the church and the church less and less like the world. If that's going to happen, that means each individual believer needs to be more in love with you than they are with anything else. I pray today, God, you will speak to us and help us to understand how we can live with certainty and we'll thank you. In your precious name, Amen.*

I was reading the results of a survey that was done by the Catholic Education Resource Center. They were doing some research on the effect of television, particularly commercials, on the lives of young and old alike. This is some of what they published. They said:

The average American watches TV for nearly 30 hours per week. That's 65 days of non-stop TV watching every year. By the time they graduate from high school, students will have viewed an average of 360,000 television commercials. The average 65-year-old will have watched 2 million commercials.

Each of these commercials has been created by smart people who pack their ads with powerful images, catchy music and humor, and memorable slogans. Most of the commercials have a primary theme, "This product (that they're advertising) will give you true happiness and deep satisfaction."

Based on the worldview presented by TV commercials, Kevin Miller from Wheaton, Illinois, wrote this little series after reading that research saying, "This is how I would rewrite the beatitudes spoken by Jesus based on the worldview of the commercials.

Blessed are those who fly to luxury vacation spots on tropical islands where they lie in chaise lounge chairs, the only two people on an enormous white beach, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those who drink much beer, for they shall be surrounded by carefree, football watching buddies and highly attractive, socially gifted women in the first half of life, and they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those who have the latest smart phone, for they shall gaze on a screen swirling with color and shall get all the information they need just when they need it, and they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those who have outstanding kids. Verily, I say unto you, highly blessed are those who have a Golden Labrador Retriever bounding along on that slow motion video playing with the kids in the park, for they shall be the envy of all real families everywhere and they shall be satisfied.”

On and on it goes.

When I was reading this, I realized as you do that TV is not the problem. TV isn't the problem anymore than the internet is the problem or a gun is the problem. Those things are morally neutral. It's what we do with those things that become the problem. When it comes to TV commercials, you can get an education on cultural indoctrination and worldview just by watching and listening closely to its message.

TV commercials and most ads seek to draw you into a worldview that says, “Things satisfy. They build your reputation. They affirm your worth. They give you status.” This worldview appeals to our selfish human desires and insatiable appetite for more, and we cannot deny that it's there. The message they send is, “You deserve what we're offering, and if you have it you'll feel better, have more status, and be recognized as successful. Everyone else has this, so you need it too.”

But of course we know all too well that things don't satisfy, and no matter how much we acquire we still feel empty and are left searching for more. We see the evidence in our own lives and in those all around us, but it doesn't stop people from still chasing after it. Even Christians can be found being caught up in it believing more of the message of the world than the message of God.

That “it” that keeps drawing us in, that empty worldview that happiness, is found in things and the more you have the happier you will be is an anti-God system led by Satan himself. That anti-God system that sends such enticing empty messages that seductively lure people away from Jesus is what John refers to as “the world.” That's why John told these Christians he loved not to have their faith or their security in Christ undermined by a love of the world or anything in it. That's why he said in verse 15:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup>The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

You know, we read things like this and we think, “Well, wait a minute. Jesus said that God so loved the world that he gave his Son to die for it, so aren't we also to love the world?” Part of the problem is that the usage of “the world” in the Scripture sometimes gets confused and used in the wrong place.

There are three primary usages of the word “world” the cosmos. First, it could mean “the physical world,” the earth. There are verses that refer specifically to that. That's not what we love. “The world” can mean “the human world,” the sum total of all humanity. This is the world that God loves and gave his Son for. But there is also “the world,” the “invisible spiritual system opposed to God and Christ whose message seeks to convince people that life is found in something apart from God or God plus.” That's the world we are not to love. We are to have nothing to do with it.

In fact, having just told these Christians that certainty of life and salvation comes to those who believe and obey and follow Jesus, now he tells them not to fall prey to the love of the world whose message is so convincing. You see, the world can't offer you anything compared to what a Christian already has. The world can't give you life. It can't add to what Jesus has already given. The only thing the world can give is death.

The false teachers and the Gnostic heretics are trying to get these believers to follow them by offering them Jesus plus the world. The world that can't give anything; it can only take away. It would only take away from the fullness that these believers already had in Jesus. John reminds them, “We live a life of certainty when we love God and not the world.” Why is this so? Because our love of God helps protect us from the love of the world, and our love of God gives us assurance of a life we cannot lose. Our love of God helps protect us from the love of the world. John said in verse 15:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

I was reading about a little boy who was taken to the doctor by his dad for his first physical checkup at an age where he was able to understand what was going on. As he sat there waiting for the doctor to come, he noticed nurse after nurse, attendant after attendant, coming to the sink, washing their hands, and going over to attend to someone, coming to the sink, washing their hands, going to help someone, washing the hands. Finally, he saw the doctor come in. He washed his hands, came over and talked to him then he left, washed his hands again. Another nurse came in and washed her hands, and finally the little boy watching all of this said to the nurse, “Why does everybody wash their hands so much?”

The nurse thought for a moment and she finally said to him, “It's because we love health and we hate germs.” That's quite an insightful answer isn't it? “We love health and we hate germs. That's why we wash our hands so much.”

You see, if you love health you have to hate germs because health and germs are diametrically opposed. You can't love health and love germs, because germs are opposed to health. Loving health helps protect you from loving germs. It's no different when it comes to God and the world. John said, “You can't love God and then love the world that hates him.” Verse 15:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

If you love the world, then you're loving what hates the Father. So you can't love the Father if you love that which hates him. God and the world are mutually exclusive. James, the Lord's brother, put it like this in James 4, verse 4:

You adulterous people --

Strong language.

Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

"Adulterous people." A carefully chosen word because James is saying, "It's like a man or a woman who says they love their spouse but then love someone else that hates that spouse." You love your marriage but you love something else that is a threat to the marriage. "It is spiritual adultery to claim to love God but to love the world," James said. "It's hatred toward God." Verse 15:

If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him.

It can't be because God and the world are enemies.

What tools does Satan use to lure people away from loving God and loving the world? He uses the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The same things he's always used. That's why John said in verse 16:

For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

That phrase, "the cravings of sinful man," is literally "the desires of the flesh or the desires of the sinful nature," the cravings or lust arising from the sin nature in all of us.

It's not very popular today to tell people that they are sinners, but until we understand that very nature in us we can't even see our need for a Savior. The truth is every human being has a sin problem, and we inherited it from Adam and Eve. That is not some fallacy Bible story, that's a reality. Adam and Eve fell, and that sin nature we inherited. We have a sin nature. We sin because we are sinners by nature. That's who we are.

Before Jesus came to live in us, all that we followed was our sin nature. There were remnants of goodness in us because we have the image of God in our lives, but all we followed was the sin nature. That's why when Paul wrote to the Ephesian church he said in Ephesians 2, verse 1:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us also lived among them at one time --

I did. You did. We all did.

Gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

That's where all of us were, and that's where all of us are without Jesus. But when Jesus comes to live in us we receive his divine nature, but our flesh—our old nature—isn't dead. It wages war with our new nature, so the Spirit of God in us and the old nature are in conflict. You feel it all the time.

Before I was a Christian, there was no conflict in me. The flesh just did what the flesh wanted to do. Once in a while there was a little twinge of hesitation because of the morality that was trying to be drilled into my life, but there was nothing strong enough to stop the sin nature from pursuing what it wants to pursue. But then when Jesus came into my life there was a conflict that started. Now, suddenly there's guilt when I want to pursue certain things. I'm thinking, "Where did that come from?" That's the flesh and the Spirit in conflict with each other. That's what Paul was talking about when he wrote in Galatians 5, verse 16:

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. <sup>17</sup>For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

They're in conflict. The old nature wants the world. The Spirit of God in you wants God. The Christian is to love God by obeying him and not giving in to the sinful deeds of the flesh. Before I knew Jesus, I didn't have a choice. I just went the way of the flesh, but now I have a choice. That's why John talks so much about obedience. But, man, Satan will use the things of the world to appeal to the cravings of sinful man. He's an expert at it.

He also uses the lust of the eyes. It's the desire aroused by what the eyes see. This certainly refers to sexual lust of all kinds fueled by pornography, racy ads, TV shows, movies, and societal immodesty. All of those things are Satan's tools to fuel the lust of the eye. But the term is broader than just sexual immorality. It refers to anything that entices the eye. In fact, it is more the idea of greed aroused by seeing. It is desire for a new house, a new car, a new blouse, or another man's wife. It is not wrong to have some of those things—not another man's wife—but a house, or a blouse, or a car. With the lust of the eyes there's a constant desire for things stealing the contentment with what we have. Which is why Jesus said to, **“make sure your eyes are good and on good things.”** Do you remember in Matthew 6 in the Sermon on the Mount? Jesus said, verse 22:

**The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup>But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!**

Then look at this, verse 24:

**<sup>24</sup>No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and money.**

You cannot serve both God and mammon. You cannot serve both God and other things. You can't have two things that you're in love with and be devoted to them both. One has to emerge as supreme. So you can't have your eyes focused on mammon, the things of the world, and keep your eyes on the things of God. It can't happen. You will end up serving what you fix your eyes on. What you desire the most is what you will pursue. So, as it says in Hebrews 12, verse 2, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Not only the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, but it's the pride of life. The NIV puts it like this: “The boasting of what he has and does.” This term refers to the pretentious hypocrite who glories in himself and his possessions. Glenn Barker, Professor at Fuller Seminary in his excellent commentary on the book of 1 John put it like this:

The pride of life will be reflected in whatever status symbol is important to me or seems to define my identity. When I define myself to others in terms of my honorary degrees, or the reputation of the church I serve, or my annual income, or the size of my library, or the expensive car or house, and if in doing this I misrepresent the truth and in my boasting show myself to be only a pompous fool who has deceived no one, then I have succumbed to what John calls “the pride of life.”

F.F. Bruce, the great commentator said:

If my reputation, my public image, matters more to me than the glory of God or the well-being of my followers, the pretentiousness of life has become the object of my idol worship. I'm worshipping what things provide me.

You see, this is the desire, the pride of life, that drives people to own houses and cars they can't afford. It's also what drives people to buy those things that they can afford to demonstrate to everyone else that they can afford them. The pride of life is seen in those who dress to impress or who always have to have the latest and the greatest and will not hesitate to let you know that they have it.

I want to let you know that things in themselves are neutral. It's not wrong to have a nice house. It's not wrong to have a nice car. It's not wrong to have a new set of clothes. But the pride of life is when you have to have those things to make a statement, to feel satisfied, to feel important, to have identity, to be recognized, to show yourself better than someone else. Or if you feel, "If I don't have those things, I can't possibly be happy, so I can't let them go." Then the pride of life has taken hold of you.

You see, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, such powerful weapons in Satan's hands, and he knows how to use them because they worked so well in the beginning he got an entire humanity to fall with those same three weapons. Do you remember his approach in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve? Humanity right out of the box. There's a man, there's a woman, and there's God in the garden. It says in Genesis 3, verse 1:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

<sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God did say, '**You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.**'"

<sup>4</sup>"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup>"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Now watch this:

<sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food --

It doesn't matter what God said. She saw that the tree had fruit that was good for food. That's the lust of the flesh.

And it was pleasing to the eye --

That's the lust of the eye.

And also desirable for gaining wisdom --

That's the pride of life.

She took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Is it any wonder that Satan uses the same old tools, because they were so effective at first and they still are. Eve, in that moment, loved the world more than God, and she took and ate it. If she had held onto God's word and obeyed him she wouldn't have fallen. Love for God is seen in

our obedience. If she had obeyed God, her love for God would have protected her from the love of the world. When we obey God because we love him, it helps protect us from loving the world.

David Jackman in his commentary said, "Our affections are either set on this world or on God. It is impossible to love them both."

Not only does the love of God help protect us from loving the world, but our love of God gives us assurance of life we cannot lose. 1 John Chapter 2, verse 17:

<sup>17</sup>The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Everything in the world is passing away. We've all seen the bumper sticker, usually on the back of some late model, high priced sports sedan with a name that screams "success." You've seen this: "He who dies with the most toys wins."

You know, every time I see that, I stop and ask myself, "wins what?"

"He who dies with the most toys wins."

"Wins what? (laughs) Wins what?"

There's nothing wrong with having things, even nice things. But what do you win if you die with more of those things? Remember, he who dies with the most toys still dies, and then what? I've done a lot of funerals. I've seen some pretty interesting things thrown into caskets to be buried with the deceased. I even read of a lady who was buried in her pink Cadillac because she was reluctant to let it go. I don't care what you throw in there. Dig it up a hundred years from now and if it survived at all they'll still be there. You can't take it with you. You had nothing when you came in the world and you take nothing when you leave. It isn't ours. It's all God's stuff. So, not only do the things of the world not satisfy, they also don't last. "They're all passing away," John said. "So why give yourself to loving those things?"

You see, that's why John told these believers to do the will of God because in so doing they would live forever. Verse 17:

<sup>17</sup>The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

The things of this world pass away; they don't last. But what does last forever is the word of God and the people who obey it.

<sup>17</sup>The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

John tells them, "Don't waste your life chasing after stuff that doesn't satisfy and won't last." In fact, Jesus said in Mark 8, verse 36:

**What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?**

You know, I doubt you're ever going to amass more wealth than Warren Buffet has amassed. He has so many billions he has to keep giving it away. He can't even manage to get his brain around how much money he has. But everything I've ever read of his life and views of God I don't believe he's a saved person. So let me ask you this, Ten thousand years from now, in a Christless eternity, what good are the billions that Warren Buffet had going to do him? That's why Paul told Timothy, in 1 Timothy 6, verse 6:

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”

<sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. <sup>8</sup> But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

David Jackman, one of Britain’s most popular Bible teachers that I’ve been quoting from one of his books, in commenting on this said, “Not only do the world’s attractions fail to satisfy, but they cannot last.”

All of these desires feed on their own fulfillment, but ultimately none of them will remain. So why should those who are heirs of the eternal world concentrate their interests and ambitions on something that is so fleeting and unreliable? We need to realize the brittleness of this world. Even before death, people who have lived this way are often convinced of the emptiness and uselessness of their lives and sometimes profoundly frightened.

A millionaire who may have lived for money can take nothing of it beyond the grave. The social climber will never be high enough up the ladder. The good-time-girl ends up as a spent alcoholic. The workaholic is made redundant or forced to retire early. Why live for these things when they cannot last? We should remember the ultimate statistic: 1 out of 1 dies. So John challenges us to make Christian decisions about the way we’re living today. If we love the world, we cannot love the Father. If we ally ourselves with the world, we live for what cannot last and condemn ourselves to be identified with its decay and ultimate judgment. Such choices are part of our human responsibility. John challenges us to ask, “Whose friend are we really? The world’s or Gods?” Glenn Barker put it like this:

All the vanity of this evil world with its devices is passing away. It has already begun to putrefy. It is a corpse not yet buried. But the person who really does the will of God has the breath of eternal life.

People take a good look around you -- a good look. Everything you see will one day be gone except people and the word of God which is eternal. So what are you investing your life in? Jesus said in Matthew 6, verse 19:

**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

Find what your treasure is and you’ll find what owns your heart. You invest in eternal things—things that last—when you pray, when you give, when you serve. You’re making investments in a kingdom that will never end. Verse 17, John said:

The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

I hope you won’t be taken aback by this illustration, but it was powerful for me to read it this way. David Hegg in his book *The Obedience Option* illustrates what he calls “overwhelming faith” or “overwhelming passion.” This is what he wrote:

He said he was talking to a young man who claimed that he couldn’t stop his pattern of sleeping with different women. The young man knew it was wrong, but he also claimed that his sexual lust was inevitable; therefore, it wasn’t his fault, especially since God had created him with such strong desires and urges.

By the way, that is a common thing you hear amongst Christians struggling with any kind of sin. “God created me this way.”

Finally, Hegg interrupted the young man and he said, "Well, suppose I came into your room and caught you and your girlfriend as you were just starting this 'inevitable process.' Suppose I took out ten \$100 bills and told you that they were yours if you stopped. What would you do?"

The young man said, "Well, I'd stop immediately. I'd rather have the cash."

Hegg asked him, "So what happened to the irresistible force of lust?"

We both realized a very simple truth: One passion may seem irresistible until a greater passion takes its place.

John would agree. "It may seem to you," he said, "that the world has an irresistible pull on your life, but a greater passion will stop the pull of the world." That's why he said, "If you will love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, if God becomes your passion, the things of the world will not be. If God is your friend then the world cannot be."

The hymn writer, Helen Lemmel, in 1922 in her great hymn "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" put it like this:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.

John would agree, which is why he called people to love God and not the world, because our love of God helps protect us from the love of the world. Satan's powerful weapons don't have as strong a hold, and our love of God gives us assurance of a life we cannot lose. Everything else passes away, but those who do the will of God live forever which is why John said in verse 15:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup>The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

That's living a life of certainty: Loving God. Doing his will. Living forever.

*Father, I want to thank you today for the simplicity in the challenge of this. I am shocked some days to see how much hold the world still has on my life. How I can find, at times, not chasing after evil things but just desiring really good things more than I desire you.*

*Lord, if we are ever to live a life of true certainty, we need you to open our eyes to see this reality. The world's system that has arrayed itself against you has a powerful message that is diametrically opposed to the message of truth. Satan is a master deceiver with years of experience with humanity and using the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life; weapons in his hands to draw us away to put all kinds of things in your rightful place. Is it any wonder, God, that we struggle so?*

*Help us to remember today that in Jesus we have the best. The world can't offer us anything compared to what we already have. Every good and perfect gift comes down from God, gifts that we are to use but never allow to it use us. We are to be in the world but not of it. We are to love God and not the world. Lord, would you help us with this?*

*As we sing this closing song, don't let these be just words that we mouth as we head out the door, but let this be a prayerful response to the fact that we want you in first place, for you to break the strangle hold of our sin and the sin of the world upon our life and be able to give ourselves, God, completely to you. Thank you for your help with this. We praise you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*