

## **The Danger of Worldliness**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Please take God's Word and turn with me to 1 John chapter 2.
2. Read 1 John 2:15-17
3. In our last study we considered the "3 Levels of Spiritual Growth."
4. And in those 3 levels we saw the evidence of growth.
5. John now talks about what hinders all spiritual growth: worldliness.
6. Worldliness, as John defines in this passage, is a love for the world and what characterizes the world.
7. What does that mean?
8. Well that's what we are going to talk about this morning but let me suffice it to say it is idolatry.
9. And the danger of idolatry is it appeals to the flesh.
10. And it gets into the heart.
11. That's why Romans 13:14 says we are not to make provision for the flesh.

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12. And Colossians 3:5 says we are to put to death our members which are on the earth.
13. In doing that then we must make sure as Romans 12:2 says, we are not to be conformed to this world.
14. To be conformed is to be molded into its image.
15. We are not to let the world mold us into its image.
16. That's why as we look at 1 John 2:15-17 the first thing we hear is *the prohibition* in verse 15.

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### I. The Prohibition (v.15a)

“Do not love the world or the things in the world.”

#### A. This is a Command

We know this by the grammar used with the word “love”

The Greek word for “love” is agapao and it occurs here in the imperative mood. That means it is a command.

John is prohibiting them from this action. He is commanding them to restrain their affections and to keep them in their proper place.

But you and I know this can be a challenge at times.

The world offers things that appeal to our flesh and we struggle at the crossroads as to whether we will give in to it or not.

There are two words in verse 15 we need to define. They are the words “love” and “world.”

First, let’s consider...

1. The meaning of “love”

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As I mentioned, this is the verb form of the noun agape.

We find this world used in John 3:16 to speak of God's love for sinners.

We find this world also in 1 John 4:8 which speaks of God's nature as "love."

The classical meaning of the word refers to a love called out of one's heart by the preciousness of the object loved.

Thus, referring to fondness and affection.

Because this world is used to speak of the kind of love that God displays to the sinner, it is sacrificial in nature.

So John is prohibiting having an affection and devotion to the world.

In the words of Romans 12:1-2, Paul says, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove

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what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Before we can go further we also need to understand what John means by the term “world”

### 2. The meaning of “world”

John uses the Greek word *kosmos* which is translated *world* 22 times in 1 John, 6 of the 22 times occurs in 2:15-17. (3 times in v.15, 2 times in v.16, 1 time in v.17)

There are 3 possible meanings for “world” (*kosmos*)

#### a) The physical world

Acts 17:4 says, “God...made the *world* and all things in it.”

#### b) The human race

**1 John 4:14 (NASB)** We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the *world*.

#### c) The evil system

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**John 12:31 (NASB)** "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.

**Ephesians 2:1-2 (NASB)** <sup>1</sup> And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> 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 said, “*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.”<sup>1</sup>

E.M. Bounds says the evil system “involves worldly affairs, earthly things, riches, pleasures, and pursuits which are shallow, frail, and fleeting.

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<sup>1</sup>Wuest, K. S. (1997, c1984). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader* (1 Jn 2:15). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

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They stir desire, draw away from God, and are obstacles to the cause of Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

“The world is the sensuous harlot with her snares of death and hell.”<sup>3</sup>

If you look at verse 16 John tells us what he means by the term “world.”

“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.”

This is what John is *prohibiting* Christians from. He doesn’t want them to give any affection or devotion to the one who rules the world, Satan, or the things that characterize the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.

Notice something else that we see in the grammar of verse 15 in the Greek word for love.

This word occurs in the present tense in Greek.

That means...

B. This was Their Current Action

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<sup>2</sup> Bounds, E.M. *Winning the Invisible War*. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Bounds, E.M. *Winning the Invisible War*. 26.

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The verb is a present imperative in a prohibition, which construction in Greek speaks of the act of forbidding the continuance of an action already going on. Some of John's readers were still loving the world-system out from which they had been saved.<sup>4</sup>

And John says, "Stop!"

1. Our attitude should be hatred not love or devotion
  - a) **Psalms 97:10 (NASB)** Hate evil, you who love the LORD, Who preserves the souls of His godly ones; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked.
  - b) **Romans 12:9 (NASB)** *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.*
2. Jesus died to deliver us from the world that is reason enough to hate it

**Galatians 1:3-4 (NASB)** <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Wuest, K. S. (1997, c1984). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader* (1 Jn 2:15). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.



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who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

3. When you examine what the Bible says about the believer's identity you learn that loving the world is inconsistent with who they are

1 John 2:13-14 says believers are those who have "overcome the wicked one."

1 John 5:4-5 says believers are those who have "overcome the world."

1 John 4:5-6 says believers are those who are not of this world.

Notice the rest of verse 15. It identifies...

### II. The Problem (vv.15b-17)

The first problem is...

- A. If You Love the World the Love of the Father is Not in You (v.15b)

Philo said, "It is impossible for love to the world to coexist with love to God, as it is impossible for light and darkness to coexist."

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“The love of the Father” is a phrase that only occurs here in the NT.

It means love *towards* the Father, yet as generated by the Father’s love to man.<sup>5</sup>

The second phrase “is not in him,” means more than that he does not love God: rather that the love of God does not dwell in him as the ruling principle of his life.<sup>6</sup>

The warning is you cannot love the world and love God!

Two things cannot have your complete devotion. God will not compete with any other or anything.

**Matthew 6:24 (NASB)** "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

**James 4:4 (NASB)** You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?

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<sup>5</sup>Vincent, M. R. (2002). *Word studies in the New Testament* (2:335). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>6</sup>Vincent, M. R. (2002). *Word studies in the New Testament* (2:335). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

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Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

The second problem flows out of the first...

### B. If You Love the World Your Life will be Characterized by the Things of the World (v.16)

What occupies your affection and devotion will be manifested in your life sooner or later.

If you love God supremely that will spill out all over your life—in your conversations, attitudes, decisions, etc.

If you have affection for the world and what it offers, you life will be characterized by 3 things:

#### 1. The lust of the flesh (v.16a)

“lust” (epithumia), refers to a “strong desire.” It could be either towards something good or evil (1 Tim.3:1; Eph.2:3).

“flesh” (sarx) refers to “the seat of sin in man.”

**Romans 7:18 (NASB)** For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not.

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The “flesh” refers to the totally depraved nature as governing the individual’s reason, will, and emotions. Thus, the lust of the flesh is the passionate desire or the craving that comes from the evil nature.<sup>7</sup>

John the Baptist said to the Pharisees in **Matthew 12:34 (NASB)** "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

Jesus said in **Matthew 15:11 (NASB)** "*It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.*"

He continues in verse 18, "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

Jesus said what’s in the heart of man in **Mark 7:21-23 (NASB)** <sup>21</sup> "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, <sup>22</sup> deeds of

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<sup>7</sup>Wuest, K. S. (1997, c1984). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader* (1 Jn 2:15). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

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coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness.<sup>23</sup> "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

### 2. The lust of the eyes (v.16b)

“lust” is the same word used referring to the flesh.

“eyes” (ophthalous) refers to the “channel into the mind and heart.”<sup>8</sup> It is the “instrument of evil 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.”<sup>9</sup>

Notice a few examples of the “lust of the eyes”...

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<sup>8</sup> Berry, George *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 73.

<sup>9</sup>Vincent, M. R. (2002). *Word studies in the New Testament* (2:336). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

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Eve - **Genesis 3:6 (NASB)** 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 desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

Achan - **Joshua 7:21 (NASB)** 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."

David – **2 Samuel 11:2-4 (NASB)** <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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?" <sup>4</sup> 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.

Men – **Matthew 5:28 (NASB)** but I say to you that everyone who ***looks*** at a woman with lust for

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her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

### 3. The boastful pride of life (v.16c)

“pride” (alazonia) refers to “boasting arrogance. It means the braggadocio which exaggerates what it possesses in order to impress other people.”<sup>10</sup>

“life” (bios) refers to those things which sustain life.

George MacDonald summarizes all three:

**The lust of the flesh** refers to such sensual bodily appetites as proceed from within our evil nature.

**The lust of the eyes** applies to such evil desires as may arise from what we see. **The pride of life** is an unholy ambition for self-display and self-glory.

These three elements of worldliness are illustrated in the sin of Eve. The tree was good for food; that is **the lust of the flesh**. The tree was pleasant to the eyes; that is **the lust of the eyes**. It was a tree

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<sup>10</sup> Rienecker, Fritz and Rogers, Cleon *The Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 788.

to be desired to make one wise; this describes **the pride of life**.<sup>11</sup>

John MacArthur says, “The apostle John identifies the three springs of evil in a climaxing sequence: sensuality, covetousness, and pride. Sensuality is the corruption of the lower part of man’s nature—his base desires. Covetousness is the corruption of a higher part. It is a selfish desire for what is beautiful, whether it is a woman, a car, a house, or a dress. But pride is the highest corruption of man’s being. It is the exaltation of man himself. By sensuality man sinks to the level of animals; by covetousness he competes on the level of men; by pride he tries to reach to the heights of God.”<sup>12</sup>

We have seen the prohibition and the problem. Notice lastly...

### **III. The Peril (v.17)**

“The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

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<sup>11</sup>MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. (1997, c1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (1 Jn 2:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>12</sup> MacArthur, John, *Love Not the World*, 59.



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There are two contrasting statements in verse 17:

The first says...

### A. If You Love the World You Give Evidence of Where You Are Going

He says, “The world is passing away, and the lust of it.”

This is a warning.

If the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the boastful pride of life still characterizes your life, then it indicates you were never saved.

Because if you are setting your heart on what is passing, it gives evidence of worldly affections and devotion.

“passing away” (paragetai, pres.mid.ind.), means “to pass away.”

Warren Wiersbe says, “That statement would be challenged by many men today who are confident that the world—the system in which we live—is as permanent as anything can be. But the world is *not* permanent. The only sure thing about this world system is that it is not going to be here forever. One

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day the system will be gone, and the pleasant attractions within it will be gone: all are passing away.”<sup>13</sup>

The world is in the continual process of disintegration, headed for destruction (Rom. 8:18–22).<sup>14</sup>

**Acts 17:30-31 (NASB)** <sup>30</sup> "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, <sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

The second contrasting statement says...

B. If You Do the Will of God You Will Live Forever  
(v.17b)

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<sup>13</sup>Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (1 Jn 2:17). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

<sup>14</sup>MacArthur, J. J. (1997, c1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed.) (1 Jn 2:17). Nashville: Word Pub.

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According to this passage, the will of God is that you set your affection and devotion on Jesus Christ and not on the passing pleasures of this world.

Warren Wiersbe 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.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (1 Jn 2:17). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

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### CONCLUSION

1. Where is your affection and devotion?
2. Is it directed at Christ or the world?
3. F.F. Bruce says, “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.
4. Listen to the following words as I conclude the message tonight. They come from an engraving from the cathedral of Lubeck, Germany:
5. 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.<sup>16</sup>
6. Let’s pray.

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<sup>16</sup>MacArthur, J. (1989). *Matthew* (480). Chicago: Moody Press.