

1 John 2:15-17 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. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Confidence – 05 Misplaced Love

A quick read through First John will remind you of some of those phrases that fill Christianity with such wonder. Walk in the light. Abide in him. We should be called Children of God; and so we are! God is love. These are phrases that are as unique among world religions, as Jesus is among people. John is writing to a group of Christians who have recently witnessed a small exodus from their ranks. They have seen respected people leave the faith and this has caused their faith to be shaken. As we move out of our series on the Kingdom of Heaven, a common question I've been hearing is "am I in it?" Am I in the Kingdom? First John is a letter written directly to this tepid heart. His letter is meant to inspire two things, that we'll see are deeply connected, a true confidence in Jesus, and a true fellowship among each other.

John provides a sense of confidence to Christians by providing several clear tests that we are meant to apply to ourselves. Our faith does not have to be mysterious to us, but in fact should be evidenced in our lives. Apparent in our self-reflection with the proper guidance. The first test that John provided was in our obedience. Are we being obedient to Christ's commands? There is not the faith part of our lives and then the living part of our lives, but rather our faith always manifests in our living. Secondly, but in a deeply related way, John calls us to test our faith by our love. Are we loving our brother in a way that is connected to and inspired by our love of God? This is the same question as asking, are we loving our brother in a meaningful way?

Now before John describes his final test he expounds more deeply on this idea of love. It is a command to properly orient our love, which he then supports with two reasons which are the exclusivity of our love, and the eternality of its object. The quality of your life is the quality of your love, and the quality of your love is determined by the object of your love.

1. The Exclusivity of our Love

1 John 2:15 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.

John, in clarifying his command to love, takes us not to the quality of our love but to the object of our love. Our love is not a general disposition but a precise action towards something, it has an object. There is no general love, it is like gratitude or faith, it is about something or for something. That is why John structures his command this way, he shows that if our love is directed towards the world then this love of the father that we are meant to be showing in the world is not in us. There are two reasons for this, a truth about you and a truth about the world that we will first work through in principle, and then examine as we experience these principles tangibly in the world.

First of all a truth about you, your own finitude. This is just a matter of humbly viewing yourself accurately. You can't walk towards the north and the south simultaneously, you can't look at something in front of you and behind you. You can't love God and the world. You're a pointed thing. You can't love your wife and a mistress, your love is finite as you are.

Secondly a truth about the world, when John uses this term "world" he is referring to those things which are inherently antithetical to God. We'll get a more clear picture of what exactly this consists in, but for now we need to see this principle, there are aspects of our world that if we set our pointed affections on them we are, by our nature and theirs, not loving God. There is no dabbling, or hedging with God. It is love for him, or hatred of him. So then by these two factors, the nature of our finitude, and the definitions in the world we are always making a choice. John Stott expounds on this concept of love saying:

And love is a fit subject for such commandment and prohibition because it is not an uncontrollable emotion but the steady devotion of the will.¹

This means that every day, we are steadily devoting our will, to things that are cultivating our love for God, or cultivating our hatred of him. The difficulty is that this can manifest in ways that are barely discernable in our lives, but opened up on a long enough trajectory and our true loves expose us. C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce* muses on the trajectory of our love.

"Son," he said, "ye cannot in your present state understand eternity...That is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporal suffering, "No future bliss can make up for it," not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory. And of some sinful pleasure they say "Let me have

¹ Stott, J. R. W. (1988). *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 19, p. 103). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

but this and I'll take the consequences": little dreaming how damnation will spread back and back into their past and contaminate the pleasure of the sin. Both processes begin even before death.²

Like Dante in his *Divine Comedy*, Lewis isn't making an ontological point about heaven and hell. He isn't saying what is there, he is simply making tangible the principle that we see throughout scripture, that our lives have a trajectory, and what might perhaps seem slightly off of our love for God in the present, on a long enough timeline is an utter distortion of our souls and an outright hatred of God. Your dabbling in lust, becomes abandonment of your spouse, your brief escapism becomes utter isolation, your moment of venting becomes hatred of a friend.

Know these two things. Your love is finite, it must be rested on something. God is not ambivalent towards the object of your love but is utterly desirous of it. Therefore do not love the world, if you love the world the love of the father is not in you. This is the first reason for John's command now let's examine the particulars, what it is that makes up the "world."

2. All that is in the World

1 John 2:16 *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.*

John offers this deeper supporting reason for his initial command not to love the world. As he states all that is in the world is not from the father but is from the world. John's argument hinges on this antithesis between those things that are "in the world" and those things that are "from the father." As stated earlier when John uses the term world, as in this context, he does not mean the whole of existence, or earthly physical reality generally. As we know the world was created good (Gen 1:31), and likewise John writes in his gospel that God so loved the world that he sent his only son (John 3:16). So what does John mean when he says to not love the world? Are we called to hate the thing that God so loved?

When John uses the term world he is referring to that which is corrupted by sin and under the dominion of Satan he writes in the closing chapter of this letter,

² Lewis, C.S. *The Great Divorce*.

1 John 5:19 We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

Just as we saw last week, there is greater story happening than just our own individual lives and loves, it is a bigger story and we are a part of it. The world has been covered in a darkness of sin, and just as there is a physical fabric of creation, there is a moral fabric of creation. The darkness that John speaks of that coats the world, is what he refers to as *the world*. It is not from God, in the way that the good creation is from God, but rather it is of the world, it stems from our sin.

Two paragraphs of effort on the problem of evil for those who feel hung up (those who don't feel free to check out). Isn't everything from God? Then isn't evil from God? How then can John say that the world is not from the father? The Bible makes a clear distinction as it shows that evil in the world stems from the willful sin of mankind. But why then would God create a world with the capacity for sin in it? God created a perfect world for demonstrating his attributes and expressing his glory. God in this demonstration stands as separate and distinct from his creation. We will not one day be absorbed into an eternal oneness that is God, and disappear as individuals. Rather our hope is to be unified with him as distinct people.

The basic philosophical question is can there be unity in diversity. The answer has often been to collapse all things into unity, therefore all things are God. Or all things into diversity, in which we sacrifice meaning as we lose a coherent story. The Christian God shows us that there will be a true unity in a diversity. All things are from him and through him and to him (Rom 11:36) and yet the evil in the world is in a very necessary way, distinct from him. In this distinction both God's justice and grace finds the opportunity to be made manifest. A world perfect for God's demonstration of his God-ness. Unity in diversity.

So then, back down to earth, let's all join back together. What is of the world that is not of the father, that we ought not to love? John lists three things. The desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life. First, desires of the flesh, this is a particularly difficult phrase to place a definition on, but thankfully this is a phrase John shares with Paul, and Paul provides us with a taxonomy of the flesh:

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you

before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Just as the fruit of the spirit is manifested in a diversity of expressions, so too are the works of the flesh manifested in a diversity of ways that are all summed up as fleshly desires. Consider this, all of the above when loved, cause an individual to treat themselves as a deity to be satisfied rather than a creature to serve. My sexual appetite exists for its own filling, my anger can be expressed at my whim, my ego can be built up in division. These things are normal fuels of the world. Do you enjoy what you have, or simply enjoy having more than your friend? Is your sexuality a means of expressing love towards your spouse or a way validating your ego?

The desires of the flesh are all internal dispositions, that place yourself at the center of creation as a pure appetite that deserves to be satisfied and likewise tears a hope of community and relationship apart. The fuel of pure diversity with no unity and no meaning.

Secondly, the desires of the eyes, this internal disposition of the flesh finds its external object in the desires of the eyes. Those things in the world in which we locate our highest satisfactions. If I have this Patagonia lifestyle, then I will feel fulfilled. If I drink this coffee, and buy that beer, and live in that neighborhood, and drive this car. Then my person will be satisfied. Now if I can do that by the time I'm 30, consider of what account my life will be! Solomon, a very wealthy man at the end of his life concludes the following:

Ecclesiastes 4:7–8 Again, I saw vanity under the sun: ⁸ one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

Do you see the foolishness in Solomon's example. He makes clear that the person in his example who finds themselves laboring for satisfaction in the lust of his eyes, has no other to share them with. These things in the world, designed for us to demonstrate a service and a glory in God by our enjoyment of them and our sharing of them, we foolishly view as ends in themselves. Look at the hedonic treadmill on which you run, you will never be satisfied until you let it go. Your trajectory is one of hatred toward God, as you treat yourself as though you were God.

Finally the pride of life, another translation is the pride in our livelihood. Those are the things we put our trust in, which sustain us. Our wealth, our careers, our

healthcare plans, our full sales pipeline, our new storefront. These things become that sense of security that only God can truly provide.

Here is the thread in the world, we treat ourselves as God. Our goal is our own satisfaction, our means is the temporal experience of the world and our safety is our own possessions. Place your love on those things in this way, and you will find yourself in hell. Your love cannot rest on that which is temporary. Eternity is set in the hearts of men, you're on a trajectory in your love. This is John's final point in this section.

3. The Eternality of our Love

1 John 2:17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

The final point, is that all these things in the world and all these desires are passing away. This engine of lust which seems to drive the world, is not the true engine, it is a surface level entertainment that will vanish as the light breaks in, and the light breaks in in Christ. In Christ we see the one who had ultimate satisfaction in complete union with God, lay that down that we might be brought in.

There are all sorts of ways to deceive yourself into thinking that you are loving God. Your pursuit of power is a pursuit of influence that you might win more to the gospel. Your pursuit of money is so that you can finally begin giving. Your pursuit of acclaim is that you might win an audience of those who might not otherwise hear the gospel. You are playing a dangerous game, the trajectory you are on will reveal itself, in the subtlety of these differences. Jonah in the belly of the whale prays to God recognizing the despair of his path,

Jonah 2:8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

Those temporal things, are calling you towards that which is eternal. Only there can your heart truly rest. In laying them down you see the true hope of life.