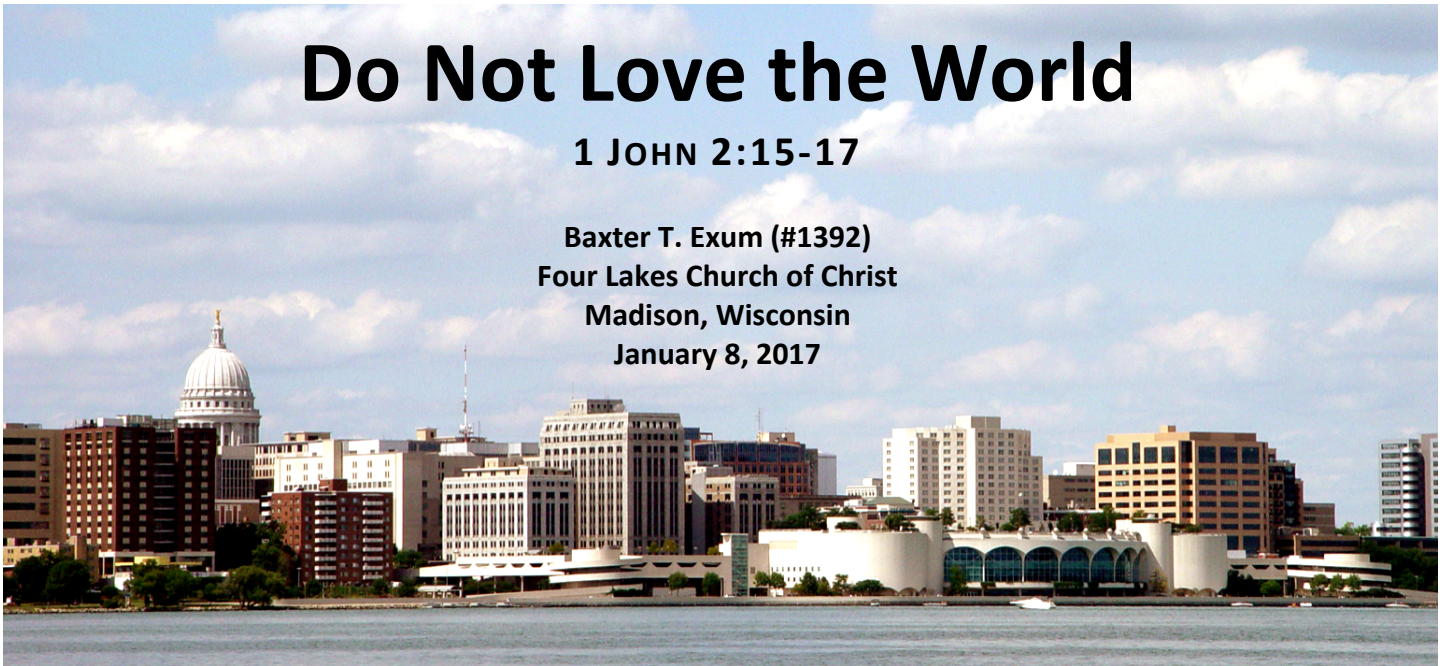


Do Not Love the World

1 JOHN 2:15-17

Baxter T. Exum (#1392)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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This morning we return to our study of 1 John! And we continue today with a passage in 1 John 2. As I mentioned several weeks ago when we started this series, most of the lessons we study here are based on requests by all of you, but this series was basically my request. On my phone, I had a reminder: Preach on JESUS, and preach on LOVE. And as I kept seeing that reminder pop up, I kept thinking about 1 John, because (as we have seen over the past few weeks) 1 John is a book about LOVE, and it is a book about the LORD.

This morning, then, we come to 1 John 2:15-17, as John gives a rather dramatic warning, a serious reminder. Notice, please, 1 John 2:15-17, where John says,

¹⁵ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

As we keep our thoughts focused on these words, I would encourage you to keep your Bibles open as we look at the COMMAND itself, as we look at the special DANGER John warns about, and as we consider what is really AT STAKE here.

- I. **But first, we focus in on the COMMAND itself, as John clearly gives the warning, “DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD.”**

And right away, we need to define what the **“world”** is. The word John uses here comes from the Greek word KOSMOS, and the word KOSMOS refers to an order or arrangement of things. This word, by the way, is the same word behind our English word “cosmetics,” and the word brings across the idea of bringing order or arrangement out of chaos. Literally, the idea is: When cosmetics are applied, some sense of order is brought to a chaotic face!

In the Bible, when this word is used, it sometimes refers to the world itself (the planet). We know that when God created the earth, he brought order out of chaos. And even today, when we look at the world, we see some sense of order and arrangement: the earth is rotating, we are in an orbit around the sun, the sun itself is

moving through space, on the earth we see various systems working together – there are currents in the oceans, we have patterns of weather that are somewhat predictable, there is a sense of order in the natural world. So, sometimes the word KOSMOS in the Bible refers to the planet itself. Was John telling us that we are not to love the planet? Is there something about this planet that is inherently evil? Well, that does not seem to be the main idea here. In Genesis 1:31, God declared that the earth was **“good.”**

When we dig a little deeper, we find that “world” sometimes refers to the people on this world, the inhabitants of this world. Was John telling us not to love people? No. In fact, John 3:16 tells us that **“...God so love the world [the KOSMOS] that he gave his only Son”** to save it. So there is a sense in which the earth itself and the people on it are not inherently evil.

So, there must be something else that John has in mind. We’ll get to this in a few weeks, but I believe we find a clue right near the end of this book, in 1 John 5:19. When we look over at 1 John 5:19, we have John saying that **“...the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”** And so it seems to me that John is warning us about the danger of falling in love with this system, this aspect of the KOSMOS that is under Satan’s control – we are not to fall in love with a worldly way of thinking. In Ephesians 2:2, Paul said that before we became Christians, we **“...formerly walked according to the course of this world.”** Before we obeyed the gospel, we had a worldly way of thinking. And so the warning here seems to be against falling in love with the system down here – the issue is not really the planet itself, the issue is not the people living on this planet, but the danger is the system, the worldly way of thinking. Do not love the world. Do not think like the world. Be different. Do not have the world’s priorities.

So we’ve defined the **“world,”** but what does it mean to **“love”** the world? Strangely (to me, at least), the word John uses here is AGAPE. Several weeks ago, we learned that AGAPE love is the kind of love that sacrifices itself for another. The warning then, is: Do not go sacrificing yourselves for this worldly way of thinking! Do not give up something of real value on behalf the world!

And so, with this in mind, we find here that the command is given in the form of a CHOICE, a TEST: We can either love God or we can love the world, but we cannot love both, **“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”** And so, it is one or the other. If we love the world, we are sacrificing (we are giving up) our love for God.

And for an example of what this looks like, we think of one of Paul’s companions, a man by the name Demas. In Colossians, Demas is one of those men who sends his greetings, along with Paul, to the church in Colossae. But by the time we get to 2 Timothy 4:9-10, Paul writes to Timothy from prison in Rome, and Paul says, **“Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica....”** Demas didn’t go off and join some earth-first movement, he wasn’t loving the world like God so loved the world (the people of the world), but Demas fell in love with a worldly way of thinking. He fell in love with the system. And so Demas made the trade. Demas sacrificed what was truly important for something of no real value, of no lasting importance.

So again, John presents this as a choice – one or the other – we cannot have both. Either we love God or we love this world. James comes right out and says it like this in James 4:4, **“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”** Loving the world, then, is described as spiritual adultery. We know what adultery is. Adultery is cheating on your spouse. So, when we love this world, we are cheating on God. We are being unfaithful to the Lord. I hear the teen class has looked at the book of Hosea lately. Hosea is a book

where God sends Hosea as a messenger, and Hosea's message to the people is that they are cheating on God. In their case, they were worshiping idols instead of the one true God, but God describes it as prostitution. In a sense, God was married to nation of Israel, but despite God's love and care, the people were selling themselves to the world. And that is the danger John warns about here: Do not go flirting with the world! Do not go cheating on God! Do not fall in love with a worldly way of thinking. Do not love the world! As Jesus himself said in 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 one and despise the other...."*** First of all, then, we have the command: Do not love the world.

- II. **As we continue in this passage, we also have John warning of a very specific DANGER, and the danger is: This world is incredibly DECEPTIVE, and this deception comes in the form of temptation.**

So, in a sense, John is saying: The playing field is not level, because in a sense, this worldly way of thinking is out to get us! It's not just a simple choice between God and the world, because the world is constantly trying to pull us in a certain direction. The world is constantly trying to influence our decision. And the influence comes through temptation. So we come, then, to these three avenues of temptation.

- A. **And John starts by describing the "LUST OF THE FLESH."**

To us, ***"lust"*** sounds like a bad thing. The word John uses here, though, is morally neutral and simply refers to any kind of strong desire. In Luke 22:15, for example, Jesus was talking to his disciples on the night he was betrayed, and he said, ***"I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."*** Jesus uses the same word John uses here, ***"earnest desire."*** To strongly desire something can be good, or it can be bad. We earnestly desire food, and drink, and sleep, we can earnestly desire to be intimate with another person. But we know that these longings (designed and given to us by God) can be a problem if they are not controlled or if they are used in a way that God has not allowed. The desire for food keeps us alive but can also turn to gluttony. The desire to drink can be turned to alcohol and can take us down a dark and dangerous path. The desire to sleep keeps us healthy, but can also develop into laziness. The desire to be intimate with another person is a great blessing but can also lead to all kinds of trouble outside a marriage approved by God.

The world, then, takes these God-given desires and uses them as temptations to sin. The world says: Do whatever feels good. The world takes our various appetites and tries to use these needs we have to pull us away from God. Isn't that what led to the very first sin back in Genesis? In Genesis 3:6, Eve sinned when she ***"saw that the tree was good for food."*** It started with hunger, but that hunger was used by Satan as a temptation. The same is true today. Satan starts with something normal, but then he tweaks it.

And these desires are so strong we might think we have no chance, but then we realize that Jesus was human like us and overcame these various temptations. Specifically, with reference to the ***"lust of the flesh,"*** we think of how Jesus was tempted back in Matthew 4. Do you remember how Jesus had been fasting for forty days when Satan appeared? And what was Satan's first temptation? When Jesus ***"became hungry,"*** Satan came to him and said, ***"If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread"*** (Matthew 4:3). Satan, then, took a God-given desire for food and turned it into a challenge, a temptation. Jesus, though, refused to give in, and answered Satan by saying, ***"It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"*** Like Jesus, we need to understand that our purpose in life is not to satisfy all of these various cravings, but our reason for living is to obey the word of God.

B. In the middle of verse 16, John continues by describing a second way the world tries to deceive us into falling in love with it as he describes the "LUST OF THE EYES."

And again, the word *"lust"* here is the same as before, only now, the temptation (the desire) is directed at something we SEE, *"the lust of the eyes."* We are thankful for the gift of vision. We came to appreciate the gift of vision when we lived down in Janesville, right around the corner from the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped. So many in that community were completely unable to see. We even had a little factory in the neighborhood, a place where the blind were able to assemble pens and pencils. For many, that is all they were able to do, and so we appreciate being able to see. But we also realize that many temptations start with LOOKING, the *"lust of the eyes."* We see something, and we start making plans to do something that we have no real right to do.

And the world around us can certainly be quite visually appealing. We think of the pictures we see in advertisements for the various fast food restaurants. It looks so good – the sandwich pile high with lettuce and tomatoes and so on – but so often what we see does not match what we find in the bag!

The same goes for sin. Didn't King David's downfall start when he saw Bathsheba? As the king, as the man after God's own heart, David should have looked away, and yet he did not. He saw, and like so many today, he started taking steps to further enjoy the one he had seen. We think of Achan and the conquest of Jericho. The people were told not to take anything from the rubble, but we find that when Achan was confronted in Joshua 7, he admitted that he *"saw"* those items, that he coveted, and then he took. He paid for that with his life and with the lives of so many others who were lost. The same goes for so many other forms of covetousness. We see the neighbor's car, we see a house across town, we see somebody's new phone, and suddenly, that is all we can think about. We see the danger of pornography here – sometimes just the act of looking has a way of taking over and changing the way we think. John is saying, then: Be careful!

Because, when we think about it, didn't the *"lust of the eyes"* also play a role back in Genesis? We can go back to Genesis 3:6, and the Bible tells us how Eve saw that the tree *"was a delight to the eyes."* And so yes, she was hungry, but the tree also looked good! Her eyes played a role in that, the *"lust of the eyes."* There's nothing evil about desiring something, there's nothing wrong with admiring a beautiful tree or a beautiful piece of fruit, but here, it's a trick. It's a trap.

Before we get overwhelmed, though, we go back to Jesus. In Matthew 4, we find that Satan took Jesus to a very high mountain and *"showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory."* Do we see it there? The lust of the eyes! Satan showed Jesus all of these amazing things and promised to give these to Jesus if the Lord would only fall down in worship. The Lord didn't fall for it, though, and instead answered once again with Scripture. The point is: When hunger didn't work, Satan moved on to something more visual.

C. We come to the third way we are often tempted as John goes on to warn about the "BOASTFUL PRIDE OF LIFE."

And so there are some temptations that appeal to our arrogance, the idea that we don't need God, that we are smarter than God, that we can leave God out of our plans because we can do whatever it is on our own. We think of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:15-21, this man who had a huge crop come in and made all of these extravagant plans to expand, but he failed to include God in those plans, and he died that night. He was overcome by the *"boastful pride of life,"* the idea that I deserve more, the constant craving for honor and applause, the kind of arrogance that sometimes keeps us from seeing our own sin. We think of the parable Jesus told about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18. In his arrogance, the Pharisee basically prayed

to himself! The Tax Collector had the attitude, ***“God, be merciful to me, the sinner!”*** The Pharisee, though, was not heard, because he was arrogant.

Going back to the beginning, we remember how Satan twisted God’s words, and Satan basically tried to say that the only reason God doesn’t want you eating from this tree is that, ***“...in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*** Satan was appealing to Eve’s sense of pride. He was basically saying, “Eve, you are fully capable of being just as smart as God. All you need to do is eat from this tree.” The text goes on to tell us that when she saw ***“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.”*** Adam and Eve fell for it.

This temptation is so strong and so effective, we are not surprised when Satan pulls it on Jesus. Again, going back to Matthew 4, the devil took Jesus into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ***“If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You’; and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”*** Satan was basically saying there, “Jesus, do something amazing! Do something that will make people understand how powerful you really are!” Satan was appealing to the Lord’s sense of pride. The Lord, though, refused to give in, and the Lord responded by saying, ***“On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”***

So we have the command: Do not love the world. And now we have the warning that this world is deceptive, constantly calling out to us through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.

III. We close this morning with a reminder from John concerning **WHAT IS REALLY AT STAKE HERE, and the reminder is: THIS WORLD IS TEMPORARY, BUT OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS ETERNAL.**

We need to be so careful which way we go here, because as John says, this ***“world is passing away.”*** And I would point out just briefly: He doesn’t say that this world WILL pass away, but he says that the world IS passing away. In other words, the world is already in the process of passing away. Of course, much of scientific thought these days theorizes that we are evolving, that things are slowly getting better, but we look around us, and we realize that the exact opposite is actually true. This world isn’t getting better. This world is falling apart! This world is in the process of passing away. It’s like building a house. We might build a brand new house, and 10 or 15 years later, we start needing new carpet, new paint, a new roof, a new water heater, a new furnace, and on and on and on. This world and everything in it is in the process of passing away. This world isn’t evolving, we are DE-volving.

John is saying, then, that we need to be living our lives and making some choices with this in mind. To invest in this world would be like buying a sinking ship. Or, as Jesus pictured it, it would be like laying up treasure for ourselves where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. This world and everything in it is passing away, and to put our hearts here is just asking to be disappointed.

The alternative, of course, is to do the will of God, because (as John says), ***“the one who does the will of God lives forever.”*** This doesn’t mean we can’t enjoy the great outdoors, this doesn’t mean we can’t invest in a decent place to live, this doesn’t mean we need to go through this life miserable, but it means that we need to keep some things in perspective. This world is not our home; we are just passing through. And we need to keep this in mind as we make decisions.

Our mission in this life is to glorify God, and we do this by keeping God first, we do this through worship, we do this by sharing the good news about God, we do this by loving each other. We have a purpose for living that people in the world do not have.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, we end with a question, and the question is: Who do we love? Do we love this world, or do we love God? Do we love what is temporary, or do we love what is eternal? Are we being tricked by all this world has to offer, or are we living for something much greater? This morning, we have a chance to reevaluate the way we're living. If you're living for eternity, great! Keep up the good work! Keep on heading in the right direction. But, if you are living for what this world has to offer, if you are not putting God in first place, we would invite you to change that. You can make the change this morning. If there's something we need to pray about as a congregation, we would invite you to talk to one of the shepherds after the service today, or right now.

Or maybe you need to obey the good news. The good news is that Jesus died for our sins, he was buried, and he came back from the dead on the third day. We obey that good news when we repent and when we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, reenacting his death, burial, and resurrection, as our sins are forgiven and as we are born into God's family. If we can help with this, we hope you will let us know right now as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com