

5,7,26 1 Jn. 2:15-17, Love Not The World

(1 Jn. 2:15-17) Love not 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 lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

DeVern Fromke made a statement in one of his books that can help set the stage for one of the potential problems we could have with vs. 15, “Love not the world.” Here’s what he wrote;

The babe in Christ will not have read very far or studied intelligently in his Bible until he comes upon passages that appear to contradict each other. Even after he has consulted all the study helps, he may be forced to acknowledge these seeming contradictions. Try as he will, he cannot escape them.

Fortunately, the *seeming contradiction* we’ll see in vs. 15 comes when we compare that verse with what we know from John 3:16. John 3 tells us that “God so loved the world” He was willing to sacrifice His Son to save it; but 1 Jn. 2:15 commands us to “love *not* the world”.

This whole issue rests on what I’ve been stressing since we started 1 Jn., and that is the issue of “context”. I’ll start with defining the “world” John is talking about in 1st Jn. 2; this is from Vincent’s work on the Greek New Testament;

The word “world” here is *kosmos* which in its use in this passage is the sum total of human life in the ordered world, considered apart from, alienated from, and hostile to God, and of the earthly things which seduce from God. Kosmos refers to an ordered system. Here it is the ordered system of which Satan is the head, his fallen angels and demons are the 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 of this world system is religious, cultured, refined, and intellectual, but it is anti-God and anti-Christ.

J.A. Trench adds this;

All of that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitutes a most real and effective power, being the moral, or the immoral atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale.

And finally, C.I Scofield in his notes on Rev. 13:8 defined it like this;

In the sense of the present world system, the ethically bad sense of the word refers to the order or arrangement under which Satan has organized the world of unbelieving mankind upon his cosmic principles of force, greed, selfishness, ambition, and pleasure. This world system is imposing and powerful with military might; is often outwardly religious, scientific and elegant; but seething with national and commercial rivalries and ambitions, is upheld in any real crisis only by armed force, and is dominated by Satanic principles.

That's what John is referring to in his letter – we are instructed to *not* love this. We sometimes forget, that due to the “elegant”, “religious” and “moral” parts of what Satan has developed, the world system is intelligently designed to control and deceive both the elect (when possible) and the lost.

When Satan offered our Lord “all the kingdoms of the world” in his temptation of Christ, the Lord did not accuse him of offering something that wasn't his. Satan is both the prince of the power of the air as well as the “god of this world”.

I want to spend a few minutes talking about the mistake Christians make of taking sides with earthly kingdoms that appear more moral than others, because they forget that we are *not* of this world, just as Christ was not of this world. Either we understand the extent to which, as a new creation, we are not of this world, or we are still trying find something good in a world God has condemned and relegated to complete destruction by fire.

(2 Pet. 3:10-11) The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt

with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be?

Now, let's re-read part of our initial passage in 1 Jn. 2 in the light of what we've seen so far;

Love not the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. . . the world is passing away. . .

When I think about who's listening to these studies, I'm not concerned about whether people are going to be drawn into the obviously dark side of the world. I don't think anyone here is going to be heading to whatever the latest version of Epstein Island is. The biggest concern for us would be whether or not we could be drawn into what would appeal to our sense of righteousness or our sense of justice, because the enemy injects both dark and light into his Kosmos system, and different personalities are drawn to different temptations.

So rather than spend time talking about the things in the world that we *already* don't love and that most Christians easily see through as evil, I'm just going to focus for a few minutes on the parts of the World system that are more likely to cause Christians to deviate from God's purpose for us and get us wrapped up in an earthly cause or mission disguised as a spiritual work of righteousness.

Our Lord did not enter this world 2000 years ago to rehabilitate any part of it, and I thought the best way to explain the implications of this would be to share something I wrote a while ago when the Church was being drawn into "election fever" and began replacing the real reason we are here with an alternative purpose which was trying to positively *influence* the "kosmos" of Satan. Here's what I wrote then;

Jesus never took one step to topple Rome or to address the immoralities of the Gentile nations. He never started a social movement or advocated for a candidate. Even when two brothers asked Him to help divide their inheritance, He replied, "Who has made me judge between you?" He was a

King, but this was not His kingdom. That's why we pray, "Thy kingdom come"; it's not here yet.

In 1 John 4:17, John says, "As He was, so are we in this world." Are we? Are we really like He was in this world? Jesus never took a stand for or against Rome, He didn't side with Rome and He didn't side with those who were plotting Rome's fall. He wasn't a Socialist, or a Communist, or a Conservative, or a Liberal, or a Democrat, or a Republican.

Throughout the last 2000 years, for those Christians who have understood the implications of being "not of this world", they have refused to be naturalized to any part of it. When they were asked who their King was, or their president, or their leader, they said, "Christ", and for that Rome killed them. When they were asked what their country was, they said, "heaven", and for that, patriots hated them. And when asked what their nationality was, they said, "Christian", and for that, nationalists despised them. Just like Jesus was hated and despised by those who wanted Him to be something He wasn't – a citizen of Earth.

(John 15:18) If the world hates you, know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of this world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of this world, therefore the world hates you.

How does it feel to be from another kingdom? How does it feel to be a stranger in a strange land? How does it feel to receive the animosity of the citizens of earth because, like our Lord, we won't join them in their earthly causes? Unfortunately, many in the Body of Christ will never know how it feels.

Dr. Larry Crabb believes we have been led off track by Christian leaders who tell us that our prayers, activism, and united influence will turn our nation around and usher in a godly society. I agree with Dr. Crabb's bottom-line rationale for why so many choose to follow this path—social crusading is easier than finding God. Persevering in our growth in Christ is a much more

difficult task than going on a “march for social equality” once a year, just as writing a letter to our congressman is much easier than a disciplined pursuit of God through the study of His Word.

All the energy being expended in social change is having very little impact for good. Whether we use immorality, crime, pornography or any other of the sins on the Moral Majority’s hit list, you may have noticed that things are not improving (which, incidentally, exactly matches the Bible’s predictions in passages like 2 Timothy 3:1-7).

Crabb also wrote this: This world, including America, is spiraling out of control and all the Christian Nationalist’s horses and men are not going to put it back together again. Our modern-day reformers, and social crusaders can lobby as hard as they want, the only thing they will ultimately accomplish is the alienation of those for whom Christ died and the anger of the “heathen” upon whom they have sought to enforce a righteousness which only Spirit-indwelt people could ever achieve in the first place (Romans 8:8 compared with 8:4).

When Christian activists emerged from their churches into the political arena, they targeted pornography, drugs, the LGBTQ+ movement and crumbling families. Pornography is worse than ever, drugs remain a problem, the gay-rights agenda advances and the divorce rates remain about the same. . . C.S. Lewis put it bluntly: ‘If you read history, you will find that the Christians who had the greatest impact on this present world were those who thought most of the next.’

And Cal Thomas wrote;

The time in our history when the Church was most effective in this world was when she was most detached from it. The power of the Church is not in her political insight, her social agendas, or her economic wealth. The power of the Church is her Lord! When the saints pursue Him in prayer, study, and corporate love instead of

pursuing personal comfort and social reform, then He responds, angels rejoice, demons tremble, and the gates of hell are stormed.

Ok, the reason I took time to read those various authors is because it's one thing to believe that we are not of this world – that we are *not* to love the world. But it's another thing to identify what the actual implications are of exhortations like we see in 1 Jn. 2. Nearly everyone who is born again will stand vigorously in favor of what John tells us about not being aligned with this world; until you look at the life of Jesus and the apostles and start to see what that would look like in real life.

And my goal in teaching passages like 1 Jn. 2 isn't just to state the obvious, get everyone to agree, and move on without showing what happens to people when they realize the full implications of being part of a new humanity which is *not* aligned with the deceptive atmosphere of Satan's Kosmos. How can we "love not" the world if we don't know what the world, in God's mind, actually is?

So, we've seen the meaning of Kosmos in the context of 1 Jn. 2. Now, what about the world we *are* supposed to love, even to the point of great personal sacrifice? What's John 3:16 telling us? The word used is still "Kosmos"; which, depending on the context it's sitting in, can also mean this;

(Quote) The inhabitants of the earth, men, the human family; the ungodly multitude; the whole mass of men alienated from God, and therefore hostile by nature to Christ.

Here are some comments by a lexical author on what he calls "layers" of meaning in the Greek word "Kosmos";

In the New Testament, kosmos is used over 180 times with several distinct layers of meaning, here are the two main uses;

Humanity: The sum total of mankind, often viewed as the object of God's love and saving work.

The World System: The negative connotation describing an organized system of values, priorities, and beliefs that are hostile to God.

Now you know why I'm so concerned about "context" in scriptural interpretation. The word "world" is far from being the only word in the Bible that can have completely different means depending on context. I won't take time to give other examples of various words that, taken out of context, have started whole systems of theology. I mainly just want to make sure we know what John is asking of us in the epistle we're studying and in case anyone wonders why John 3:16, for example, makes 1 Jn. 2 confusing – it's not confusing as long as we don't neglect the context each verse is sitting in.

Again, as to John's warning itself, Zane Hodges makes a good point;

John is not so sanguine as to believe that his readers do not need to be warned against loving the world. The world, conceived of as a moral and spiritual system designed to draw humanity away from the living God, is profoundly seductive and no Christian, however advanced, is fully immune to its allurements. (1 Cor. 10:12) "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

Since we've already seen that Kosmos has various nuances in its meaning, it might be a good idea to identify and define *which* aspects of the world John is focused on, and warning about, so we'll have a better idea of what, specifically, we need to be watching out for. John helps with that in vs. 16; "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."

This is the same approach Satan used in the Garden with Eve.

(Gen. 3:1-6) The serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the

eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

“Good for food” is “the lust of the flesh”; “pleasant to the eyes” is “the lust of the eyes”; and “desirable to make one wise” is “the pride of life”. Odds are high that for each of us, Satan’s appeal will fall into one or more of those categories. It helps to not be ignorant of his devices if we want to be aware of what’s happening around us – and to us.

Satan’s temptations will be adjusted to our personality and backgrounds. The enemy has been watching us, and working on us, since we were born, so he has a pretty good idea of what does and what doesn’t work in our case, so he will adapt accordingly.

The “lust of the flesh” refers primarily to immorality but it’s also tied to excesses of things that aren’t sinful in themselves – like alcoholism and gluttony. Jesus was called a “wine bibber” (which just means one who drinks wine openly and in excess). He *was* open, but not in excess. He was accused of that because He drank wine around people who considered *any* amount as being too much. The same with food – eating food is good idea; eating too much food is a problem. The overall meaning of “lust of the flesh” can refer to anything the flesh craves taken to extreme.

The guidance of the Spirit through our conscience is needed to sort it out as related to individual issues. As we grow, we become more sensitive to the difference between things that are fine and things that are fleshly cravings; we become more aware of the actions and desires of our flesh; and we don’t wonder any more whether or not we have within us a nature that is contrary to the new nature that we have from God.

“Lust of the eyes” could be a person or a thing, and again, the right or wrong, good or bad, of the attention-getter depends on more than the obvious things (like pornography, or mansions, or fame or whatever we wish we had), it also refers to things that are not sinful in themselves, but have the potential of becoming an obsession for us if we devote a lot of time and energy thinking about them and

wishing we had them. We are to be content with food, shelter and clothing; the rest is frosting on the cake and the church in the West has been richly blessed with a large number of things most of our brothers and sisters around the world can only dream about. We really don't have anything to complain about, but we do anyway because of the power of the "lust of the eyes".

Finally, the "pride of life" has to do primarily with 'display', 'appearance', or 'presentation'. It becomes too important to us how we look, how others perceive us, how successful we appear to be, what we own and how much power or influence we have over others. It's doing all we can to make sure our outward appearance, in all aspects of life, is the best it can possibly be, not just for the sake of not being repulsive, but to draw out envy and admiration from others.

In reality, all three of these fleshly inclinations could overlap. For example; If a man covets another man's wife (like David did with Bathsheba) and it leads to an increased physical desire for her; and then, if that desire is fulfilled, the man brags about his conquest, we'd see all three "lusts" in full operation overlapping in one brief series of events.

The New Testament calls this "carnality" which just means that the individual is ruled by his flesh – his sin nature is governing his decisions and actions. Since this is a daily battle for all of us, if it weren't for 1 Jn. 1:9, we'd never be in fellowship with God, because there is "none who sinneth not". Hopefully, over time and growth, sinning becomes less frequent, but as we saw in 1 Jn. 1:8 & 10; "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

The "truth" and "His word" will eventually give us a reality check when we start congratulating ourselves on our perfection. It still amazes me that Nazarenes believe in achieving the eradication of the sin nature prior to death. Here's the way that's described in their doctrine;

The Church of the Nazarene teaches that through Entire Sanctification, a second work of grace subsequent to salvation, the Holy Spirit cleanses believers from the "sin nature". This doctrine states that believers can be

fully devoted to God, empowered to love Him perfectly, and enabled to live without committing voluntary sins.

I don't know about you, but pretty much all of my sins are voluntary; I rarely, if ever, 'accidentally' sin. If I had to choose a plaque to remind me of how gracious God has been and how fully embracing the blood of Christ is, I'd have 1 Jn. 1:9. Because of what Christ has done for us, we are not only free to enter heaven and even the inner sanctuary of the High Priest, we can live in unbroken, abiding, fellowship with God in this life by living openly and transparent before God. We don't deserve any of this, but grace has made it possible for all of us.

So, all of these "lusts of flesh, eyes and pride of life" have their source in the sin nature which is *not* eradicated until we leave this planet;

(1 Jn. 2:16) For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father. . .

Satan makes his appeal to our flesh; but temptation is only an *appeal*, it's not sin. If we recognize its source, we can step back, avoid unnecessary guilt, and walk away from it. We don't allow it to "conceive and give birth to actual sin".

Something we're *tempted* to do is *not* sin until we do it.

Eve might be a good example. Until she actually ate the fruit, all that is happening is a dangerous conversation. And the way you can tell what Eve does in that conversation that indicates her likelihood of following through with Satan's offer is simple- Eve "listens to evil".

Eve doesn't walk away knowing she's being pulled in a false direction; she listens to see what will happen next. Satan knew he had her when she gave him her attention. She starts tracking with him and he simply leads her on with rational arguments for rejecting what God had said.

The trap she stepped into was listening to him in the first place. That's our place of escape if we'll take it. As soon as we recognize the source of the offer, that should end the conversation. The only way sin can be avoided is to walk away during the temptation phase.

And also, don't get "re-trapped" by the enemy when he tries to make you feel guilty for being tempted.

This applies to "sin", but also to false doctrine. The Church is being "offered" a lesser Christ and counterfeit purposes for what we are here and for what we are to be doing. If we "listen" to these things with what is called "an open mind", we're likely to continue down that road until we are fully supportive of what we, at one time, would have avoided like the plague.

When we sin, we are in a cooperative relationship with God's enemy. We can resist him, or we can accept his offer; but this whole transaction is a two-person interaction – Satan and us; his thoughts to our minds.

Imagine what it will be like when our flesh falls away from us and we are as perfect in righteousness as Christ is by being fully conformed to His image- complete purity of heart and soul; not even the slightest desire for anything this world has to offer.

Young Christians often want to know what they can do that's acceptable, they want to know where the line is drawn, but a mature Christian truly desires to avoid anything that would be unacceptable to God – not just to know what they can or can't "get away with", but purely out of love for the Lord and trust in His wisdom.

Ok, we have to close up soon – so I want to provide an overview of what John is emphasizing in the passage we've studied. The world, flesh and devil are formidable enemies; they should not be underestimated, but in Christ, they have each been overcome, and we are in Christ whether we realize the practical value of that or not.

Our job, so to speak, is to pray, study and experiment in daily life to learn how the reality of the Lord's victory *for* us can be experienced and lived out *in* us. Our goal is to empirically understand Paul's statement in Gal. 2:20; 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in this body, I live in complete dependence on the Son of God Who loved me and died for me.'

We are to shift the way we've always lived, depending on our own resources of strength, commitment and wisdom, to a completely new way of living by transferring our dependence upon ourselves to dependence on Christ for

everything in this life. That's how we die to us and live in Him; it's what "picking up our cross daily" means in real life.

It's a mindset we aren't used to, so it takes time for it to become natural and spontaneous.

The old way of living this life is exchanged for a new way of living; that takes experience, prayer, study and faith to learn, understand and then act on. And even that part (the progressive, time-consuming task of entering this school of learning), is supported by passages like Phil. 2:13 & 1:6 which are meant to reassure us that the Spirit of God is more than willing to support and complete our education;

It is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

(And in the amplified version) I am convinced and confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will continue to perfect and complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.

John's challenge to us is to learn how to distinguish that which is of God and that which is of this world, whether in regard to evil or to religious imitations.

It will take a more detailed examination of individual words and phrases in John to get us there, but I'll close with an excellent overview of how Watchman Nee describes the mindset of someone who has, in a sense, learned the secret of what causes the expression of the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives - which, of course, is both the opposite of, as well as our protection against, living in the "fruit" of the world system that we are to reject;

In examining the fruits of the Holy Spirit—which express Christian testimony—we shall readily see that they are simply selfless acts. What is love? Love is loving others without thinking of self. What is joy? It is looking at God *in spite of* self. Patience is enduring one's own hardship. Peace is disregarding one's loss. Gentleness is overlooking one's rights. Humility is forgetting one's merits. Temperance is the self under control. And faithfulness is self-restraint. As we examine every Christian virtue, we will discern that other than being delivered from self or being forgetful of self, a

believer has no other ultimate virtue. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is determined by one principle alone: the losing of self totally.

We have to pray that God will show us how we can lose our selves for the sake of both the testimony of Christ and the freedom that we can experience if we take ourselves out of the picture. This is simply another way of explaining what it means to “pick up our cross”, it’s consenting to our crucifixion in order to obtain the fruit that comes by removing our greatest hinderance to that fruit – which is us.

Even though the circumstances of life itself seem to force us to think about ourselves most of the time, it still remains true that to the extent we are able, through practice and patience, to look away from ourselves to Jesus as the Author and Finisher of our faith, to that extent we will be free and living in Him instead of in us.

I’ll wrap up our study tonight by sharing something I found on a passage in Galatians. First, here’s the Galatian passage, it’s Gal. 5:1; “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

There is a word which just means ‘that which has escaped from slavery and is breathing the air of freedom’. That is a fine picture, a fine portrait for Overcomers – that which has escaped from slavery and is breathing free air. Some of us, even in our Christian lives and histories, know what it is to escape from slavery; to escape the old bondage of the Christian system and order, expectation and demand, all the old rules and legality – to be free of it all. Not only to be raised with Christ, but to be breathing the free air of the spiritually emancipated! That is not something extra to Christianity. It is exactly what you find at the beginning with the Church. Everything they did was simply the expression of the new life being formed in them. There was nothing “religious” about any of it.

In Matt. 11:28-30, the Lord had cried in the midst of a burdened, tyrannized, religious nation –

"Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

What is the old yoke, the old burden, which has harassed and worn these people so that they are weary unto death, drawing out His compassionate appeal – "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest"? It is the old yoke and burden of legalistic religion, 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not': 'you must' and 'you must not' – the whole system built up like that; a great burden. "The Pharisees bind heavy burdens," He said, "and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with their finger" (Matt. 23:4). Those who leave that world and enter the freedom that Christ offers are those who have escaped slavery and are breathing the free air. You find them in the beginning of the book of the Acts. Overcomers are those who go back to the beginning. It is the primal freshness and fullness of Christ that Overcomers represent – unfortunately, in contrast to the general situation.

The enemy does all he can to keep us self-condemned and obsessed with the things of the world. Christ came to free us from both guilt and worldly obsession. As we study 1 John, we're going to see more of how this can happen for us through an increased knowledge and experience of abiding in Christ with our backs turned to all that is not "grace". This is the age of Grace, not Law, and the clearer that becomes for us, the freer we will be – we will be breathing free air because the Truth will have set us free.