

The World and Its Desires Pass Away

1 John 2:15-17 (NIV)

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

“Scripture is like a river, broad and deep, shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim.” This quote is attributed to Gregory the Great, a pope of the Catholic Church who lived in the 6th century A.D. He’s commenting on how simple the Bible can be, but how at the same time even the simple things have great depth to them. The Apostle John often wrote like this. His words are simple. They are easy to understand, easy to translate, but at the same time they present us with a depth that can be explored. Today’s three short verses from John’s first letter allows for that simplicity and depth.

“Do not love the world or anything in the world.” (verse 15) What do we think of when we hear that phrase “love the world”? Do we think of family reunions and family picnics, that that’s my world? Do we think of adventures in the great outdoors, camping trips, fishing trips, hunting trips, that that’s my world? Do we think of the beauty of the nature that surrounds us, that this is my Father’s world? Do we think like Leonardo DiCaprio that loving the world means being a global warming activist seeking to unite the world’s governments to find solutions to what he calls the most imminent threat facing our world?

The word “world” conjures different images for different people. Even the Bible uses the word “world” to mean different things in different contexts. When the Bible says God made the world, he is talking about the actual, physical place that we live on. He’s talking about making the sky, the trees, the mountains, the lakes – everything on this world in all its beauty and majesty. God also uses the word “world” to refer to life, to the human inhabitants of the world, that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Other times God uses the word “world” as he does here through John as a contrast to God, that the world is contrary to God, it’s imperfect while God is perfect.

God is using the word “world” here to refer to sinful things because John further describing that to love the world or anything in the world is to love “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (verse 16) – all things which do not come from the God the Father. Lust of the flesh is a craving of our sinful nature, the desire to do something bad. These are the things that we know are wrong, but we want to do them. It’s kind of like the pursuit of happiness. If this makes me feel good, well that I want to do it regardless of the morality of it. It makes me feel better to put down the people who upset me, who rub me the wrong way, so I’m going to do it even though I know I should not. I know that I shouldn’t indulge in that one more cupcake, but I want it. So, I’m going to. The lust of the flesh is the desire of the world that is always seeking selfish payout of pleasure.

The lust of the eyes is what we call coveting, wanting something that God has not given you. This isn’t just the desire to have something. This is the desire to have something because someone else has it. You can see this more easily with kids. “I want that toy.” “Why?” “Because my brother has it.” They may not even want to use it; they want it for themselves to deprive the other person of having it. What do you eye up and want just because it not yours? Is it the RV at the neighbor’s house? Is it that person who is not your spouse? Is it wanting people who are happy to be brought down a notch because you are not having a good day, that if you are not happy then they should not be happy either? The lust of the eyes creates a vacuum in our lives, an insatiable hunger of wanting things that we don’t have, maybe can’t have.

The pride of life is the promotion of yourself. This is arrogance – exaggerating your own worth or importance, announcing how good you are instead of letting someone figure that out. Look at what I accomplished. Look at my talents and my abilities. I am the greatest! But are you the only one who can take credit for your achievements? Did you accomplish all these things unilaterally? Do you take pride in you doing what you do because you do it?

To love the world is to love these things, to give them preference in your life. These desires of the flesh, of the eyes, the pride of life, these run contrary to God and his will, what he wants, his desires for your life. These desires of the world are vying for your attention, to have you focus on them, to have you devote yourself to them. They want to be first in your life over everything else. To love the world is to love sin. To love the world is to devote yourself to the things of this world over God and his will, what he wants for your life.

As Christians, we find ourselves locked in a battle between these two desires. These desires of the world feel like they never go away. Day in and day out they plague us, run through our minds, drive our thoughts. We want them out of our heads. We know that these are not things that I should do, that I should stay away from them, but they keep coming back to me over and over again. I'm tormented to try to do what I know is right, to do the will of God, to be content with what he has given me, to know that he gives me everything that I need, that there is nothing that I do in this life without him giving me the strength and talent to do it, that I have nothing to boast about when it comes to my accomplishments.

How can we fight loving the world and its sinful desires and instead do the will of God? With man all by yourself, all alone, this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God. We have often loved the world instead of loving God, preferred and pursued the world and its desires over God and his, but John tells us, "If anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2)

Jesus Christ loved God the Father. He loved the Father instead of the things of this world. He did the Father's will by devoting himself to God and his Word. He said no to satisfying the desires of the flesh. He averted his eyes from lusting over the promised pleasure of the world. He did the Father's will in order to give glory to God instead of to himself. After his crucifixion when God the Father raised his Son Jesus from the dead. This was the proof that Jesus had done the will of God. Jesus now lives forever as one who did the will of the Father, who loved the Father over the desires of this world, for us.

Because Christ did this, God removes that dividing barrier of sin from between us and him created by our love of the world and its desires. God has purified us with the forgiveness of sins by the fact that Jesus did the will of the Father for us. As John says, "I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name." (1 John 2:12) The outcome in our struggle against loving the world is already secured. "The word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one." (1 John 2:14) Christ has overcome the world for us. He has overcome the evil one for us. He has cleansed us from all our sin, and he has made us new, as one now who loves the Father over the desires of this world.

Because Christ has overcome the world, it will pass away. They have an expiration date. The world and its desires will pass away on the Last Day, on Judgment Day, when God ends the world and judges all its inhabitants. At that time God will restore the world to the perfect world that he always desired for us. That means that the desires of the world are temporary. The time will come when we will never have any desire vying against our love of God and his will. The desires of the world will be dead along with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. God's desires win out over the desires of the world, secured for us because Jesus Christ lives forever.

Until that day comes when the world and its desires pass away, what will you do? Will you love the world and its desires or will you love the Father and his will? If you love the world and its desires, they will not satisfy you. They will pass away and eventually leave you empty. If you love God by doing his will, you will be satisfied. The one who does the will of God will live forever because Jesus lives forever. He has loved the Father and done his will for us. You are forgiven. You are made new to love the Father and do his will. Amen.