

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part nine
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SAVING FAITH MEANS LOVING GOD AND LOVING WHAT GOD LOVES

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. [16] For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. [17] And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

This is really a very simple text to unpack. There is only one command in the text, and that should tell us it is John's main point. The one command is "**Do not love the world or the things in the world.**" Then there are **three arguments** for obeying that command.

The three arguments are as follows:

First, don't love the world because, if you do, **you can't love God** - "**....If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him**"(15). You can't love the world and love God at the same time. Love for the world pushes out love for God and love for God pushes out love for the world.

Second, don't love the world because "**the world is passing away along with its desires**"(17). Don't misread this. It's not just the **world** that's passing away, but **we** will perish along with it. The actual **desires** meet the same end as the worldly **objects** on which those desires are fixed. There's no lasting future in loving the world. It's one thing to buy bad stock in ignorance. It's entirely another to sell your home and business and empty all your bank accounts just to spend it all on stocks you **know** are going to be worthless tomorrow.

Third, don't love the world because only the one who "**does the will of God abides forever**"(17). This is the positive side of argument number two. Just as surely as the one who loves the world perishes along with it, the one who does the will of God "**abides forever.**" Notice also the connection John clearly intends to make between **loving God** and **doing His will**. John wants us to see that having the "**love of the Father**" in **verse 15** is marked by "**doing the will of God**" in **verse 17**. These two are so closely related John can use the phrases almost interchangeably. **Loving God** and **doing the will of the Father** are almost the same thing in John's theology.

That's a quick overview of our text. But there is a hidden, strange issue **behind** it. **You would think it would be easier to love God than it is.** Look at how often we're encouraged to love Him in the Scriptures. Look at how worthy of love He is - how merciful - how kind - how pure and holy - how just.

Look at how many good things we receive from His hand each day of our lives. There is no shortage of bounty from God on our behalf. Love for God ought to flourish naturally in our souls. All sacrifices ought to seem small. Yet, when you look at the Word of God and the pattern of history, people have to constantly be **encouraged, begged and commanded** to come to God in humble, thankful, adoring love. Even **Christians** are constantly urged in the Scriptures to keep their first love for God. They have to be **told** not to turn to idols, not to commit adultery, not to forsake their Maker.

Now that is the subject John addresses in our text. He's writing about our **love for God** and what **threatens** that love. Notice he doesn't give us a list of **"worldly activities."** John is more concerned about this battle to love God with the whole heart. And he wants to help us understand **why** it can be perceived as difficult and **what** can be done to set our hearts in order.

I think there are only **two approaches** to growing in love for God.

- 1) **YOU CAN TRY TO MAKE YOURSELF LOVE GOD MORE BY CONSTANT EFFORT TO STIR UP FEELINGS OF LOVE FOR HIM IN YOUR HEART - USUALLY THROUGH PROTRACTED SEASONS OF CORPORATE PRAYER, PRAISE, AND WORSHIP**

There is absolutely nothing wrong with extended times of worship. The Bible **calls** us to express our devotion to the Lord, not only in **service** but in **praise and worship**. It's a cop out to say we just obey the Word and leave praise and worship to those fanatical charismatics. You can't choose **between** worship and obedience because worship is **commanded** by the same God who commands all the other forms of obedience as well.

In other words, you aren't **obeying** God fully unless you **are** a person of passionate praise and worship. The Scriptures are full of such commandments to praise and adore and worship. All of this is a given in my mind. But my point right now it **not** that this desire is **wrong** so much as perhaps **misdirected** and **incomplete** in terms of creating and sustaining love for God in my heart. And it's the incompleteness that causes the problem. And it's what I want to address first.

There are times of spiritual refreshing in God's presence. This is as it ought to be. You've experienced it, I'm sure. You begin to feel burdened for the barrenness of your own heart. You begin to feel almost convicted as you sing. You hear the cry of those around you for more of God. A longing starts to well up in your own soul. **"O yes, Lord. That's what I want for my own life! I'm so empty. I've put this off too long. I reach out to You!"**

The heart aches and breaks, and tears begin to flow. And God graciously begins to warm your heart and flood your soul with His presence.

And there is nothing at all wrong with that touch from God. It **is** wonderful **and** Biblical. But unless we understand God's **intent** in that touch we're going to be tragically disappointed because the effects of that touch were never meant as an **end**. They were meant as a **beginning**.

Without a Biblical understanding of what John describes in our text, the warmth of that touch will be gone by Wednesday. And my life will still be unchanged. This is because I **can't sustain my sense of love for God at that emotional peak by my own efforts directly**.

I believe there is a better way to grow love for God. It's Biblical and true. But it's the road less traveled because it extends beyond the bounds of the worship service.

2) **I CAN GREATLY INCREASE MY LOVE FOR GOD ONLY BY ELIMINATING COMPETING OBJECTS OF AFFECTION**

Sometimes at night I'll warm up a snack in the microwave. My wife fiddles around with apples and celery. I like those little frozen pizzas. And I've learned how the micro wave works. The more little items you put on the plate the longer it takes to warm them all up. There are more items absorbing the power. Less and less energy reaches each item directly.

Now we're coming back to the heart of the question I raised at the beginning of this message about **why loving God isn't the easiest thing in the world to do**. John opens up the door to understanding that issue. It **isn't** hard to love God. He's supremely lovable and worthy of all devotion. In heaven, around the throne of God, **all** created beings love Him effortlessly and

tirelessly **all** the time.

But I'm not in **heaven**. I'm on **earth**, surrounded by the things of this world. And the problem is my heart can only devote itself to so many objects. John says my love for God gets **repelled** by my love for this world. I wrongly conclude loving God is hard, but it isn't. I simply have too many gods on my plate. My devotion to God is bound to be thinned out.

3) **JOHN SAYS LOVE FOR GOD AND LOVE FOR THE WORLD CAN'T EXIST IN THE SAME HEART**

1 John 2:15-16 - "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.** [16] For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world."

This is very uncomfortable for us to hear, but it is the real problem. My devotion can't be turned **toward** God until it is turned **away** from this world. John doesn't mean we shouldn't love this world in the sense of being engaged in **reaching it for God**. We are to be **engaged** in this world with the same kind of love Father God demonstrated for the world when He **"so loved the world that He gave His only Son."**

That kind of love for the world isn't a **threat** to my love for God because that kind of love for the world **is** love for God. It is love for God because it is devotion to His passion and work. I'll talk about this more in my conclusion.

But there's another **kind** of love for the world that isn't **God's** love at all. John zeros in on the much more common love for the world that is love for the **pleasures and possessions** of the world. That's a **selfish** love that God doesn't have for the world, and He doesn't want me to have either.

This is the love for the world John is warning about. It's a deadly love. It must be dealt with **before** love for God is possible. In other words, I can't just concentrate on **growing love for God**. While I follow Jesus in this world, in order to love God **more** I have to love this world **less**.

Please think about that for a minute. How much energy does the church spend trying to get people to love God more? Feed on His Word. Grow in prayer. Attend church with consistency. Seek the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

None of this instruction is bad or untrue. But somewhere along the way a thoughtful Christian has to stop and say, "Why isn't this all working better than it is? Why is there so much effort and so little changed character? Why can I worship so well on Sunday yet live so badly on Tuesday?"

Honestly, don't you ever ask yourself any questions like that? Why is it that the church in so many poor, third world countries is exploding and drastically changing the society around it? Why are we denting our world so little?

I'll tell you my opinion. In North America, we try to get people to love God more **without** compelling them to love the world less. We've discovered how **marketing religion** works in North America. People will flock to churches that just emphasize loving God more with better music, better choruses, better media presentations, and snappier services - preferably brief, with café lattes and moccachinos. But in terms of **transforming** people into the image of Christ and **confronting** our culture with its own pathetic emptiness this approach will never work.

This is the constant teaching of the whole New Testament. Look at the words of Jesus in perhaps His most famous parable about how the kingdom of God expands in power and influence in the human heart:

Matthew 13:7, 22 - "Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them....[22].... As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."

Make no mistake about it. This is not a man who is just itching to ruin his spiritual life. In his own mind he's trying to grow. Listen, ***that's why he's listening to the Word in the first place!*** This person seems to have a heart to know God. He reads his Bible. But for all his devotional time with the Father, for all of his attention to carefully read and study the Word of God, he's going nowhere.

And here's where John got his theology about the danger of love for the world. This man in Jesus' parable is going nowhere spiritually, and he's going to remain in this dead state no matter how much he reads the Word because ***there's something else in his heart that's making God's love and power "unfruitful."*** (Notice the very last phrase in **Matthew 13:22** - "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves **unfruitful.**")

Underscore that word, ***"unfruitful"***(22). That's John's point in our text. "....If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"(2:15b).

4) **WHAT DOES JOHN MEAN WHEN HE SAYS "DON'T LOVE THE WORLD"?**

He explains that in **verse 16** - "For all that is in the world— the **desires of the flesh** and the **desires of the eyes** and **pride in possessions**—is not from the Father but is from the world."

In **verse 16** John breaks his analysis of ***loving the world*** into three statements. He talks about the ***"desires of the flesh,"*** the ***"desires of the eyes,"*** and ***"pride in possessions."*** All three are related and all three revolve around ***things***. That's the world system John is analyzing - ***things*** geared to ***creating*** but never ***meeting*** our deepest desires.

Here's how these three things de-construct love for God. The first two - ***"desires of the flesh,"*** and ***"desires of the eyes,"*** are geared to the things we ***want*** to have. The last one - ***"pride in possessions"*** - relates to things we ***already*** possess.

This is how John describes the two manifestations of the ***world's passion for pleasure***. There is the ***thrill of getting*** and the ***joy of having***. These, according to John, are what make love for God impossible. And that leads to the really important question. ***Why*** do these three worldly desires - ***"the desires of the flesh,"*** the ***"desires of the eyes,"*** and the ***"pride in possessions"*** - why do these desires make love for God impossible?

Very quickly, I think there are at least three reasons:

A) FIRST, THE “DESIRES OF THE FLESH” EXPAND TO INCREASE OUR SENSE OF NEED FOR THEM

In other words, they are **demanding** desires. We all know how **luxuries** turn into **necessities**. And this has important spiritual implications. We all know how Jesus describes the work of the Holy Spirit in us being like a **spring** or **fountain**. Well, the desires of the flesh are exactly the opposite.

The desires of the flesh are more like the **drain at the bottom of your swimming pool**. They constantly **suck more and more of you into them**. And they are so effective at reaching out for our worship because we were **all** created as creatures of **desire**. We were all made to **love** something (specifically Someone) outside ourselves.

The spirit of this age keeps churning out idols for our hearts to worship. Paul saw this danger and said this alone would make the last days the most **“difficult”** on earth:

2 Timothy 3:1-5 - “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty, [2] For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3] heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, [4] treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, [5] having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”

Read those character traits and weep. They describe the only life-style left for those whose lives are being swept along by the current of the desires of the flesh. Needs are stretched into **cravings**. And cravings are stretched into **addictions**. And addictions become the **gods we worship**. No Tsunami has greater power.

B) SECOND, THE “DESIRES OF THE EYES” ARE SO ATTRACTIVE THEY HIDE THE TRUTH THAT THE WORLD AND ITS DESIRES ARE PASSING AWAY.

The system of this world is to attract all of us to love the **outward appearance of things**.

This is the enemies' ploy to keep us from alerting ourselves that everything in this world is passing away.

The lust of the eyes is the devil's trick to **shut eternity out of our plans** and to lock us into **thinking short-term**. This is so important because the things of Christ **never** seem relevant, let alone important, to people whose minds are fixed only on present pleasure. The glories of God are made to appear boring.

C) THIRD, THE "PRIDE IN POSSESSIONS" DESTROYS LOVE FOR GOD BY THE ILLUSION THAT I CAN SECURE MY LIFE BY WHAT I HAVE RATHER THAN WHO GOD IS.

Pride in possessions **keeps me out of touch with what's desperately wrong with my own life.**

Most of us know these famous words from the lips of the ascended Christ - "**Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me**"(Revelation 3:20).

What many don't know are the words found right **before** this text. But we **need** to know the context of Jesus knocking at the heart's door because the preceding words explain why Jesus is always still **outside** and knocking to get in. Why don't people **let Jesus in?** Look and see:

Revelation 3:17-18 - "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. [18] I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see."

Underscore those words, "**not realizing**"(17). These people - these **church** people - don't even know Jesus isn't **in** their hearts. I'm sure they're assuming He is. Their "**pride in possessions**" keeps Jesus on the outside. Just as John explains, love for the world

makes love for God *impossible*.

5) **HOW SHALL WE CLOSE WITH SUCH AN IMPORTANT TEXT?**

Obviously, the stakes are very high - **1 John 2:17** - "And the world is assing away along with its desires, but **whoever does the will of God abides forever.**"

"Whoever does the will of God abides forever"(17). Things that ***abide*** are obviously better than things that ***pass away***. We crave ***everlastingness***. Eternity hangs in the balance when affections are afixed to trinkets. This is one problem we can't ***buy*** something to fix. There is no amount of wealth to solve this problem. The things we buy only ***increase*** this problem.

The solution is redirecting and editing of our loves to ***love nothing but God*** and to ***pursue nothing but God***. And this is ***not*** impossible to do. This is exactly what Paul was talking about in **1 Corinthians 10:31** - "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God.**"

This verse has almost nothing to do with saying "grace" before meals. It has to do with the overall direction of the whole of life.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 - "Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, [24] but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."