

*There was a man who had grown weary of the daily bombardment of attractive people telling him that he couldn't be happy unless he owned the product that they were selling or adopted the lifestyle that they were pursuing. He could no longer tolerate the twisted influence of the media, he was exhausted by the enticements to sin, and he couldn't cope with the constant pressure to keep up with everyone else around him. He was done with the world, so he decided to get away from it all and joined a mute monastery. It was a very demanding commitment. Monks could only say two words every five years. For the first fifteen years, monks were on trial, and if they were successful in meeting the requirements of the monastery during this fifteen-year trial period, they could then take their final vows.*

*Perfect, the man thought. This is just what I need. So, he joined, and for the first five years he didn't say a word. At the end of that time, he was called into his superior's office where he was told he could say two words.*

*"Bad food!" he complained.*

*"Thank you, I'll make a note of your observation," his superior replied.*

*The man went back to his duties and for another five years didn't utter a word. At the end of that time, his superior asked him if he had anything he would like to say in two words.*

*The man responded, "Hard bed!"*

*For another five years he said not a word. His superior called him in and asked him if he had anything to say and if he was ready to take his final vows.*

*The man stood up and said, "I quit!"*

*His superior replied, "Well, I'm not surprised. You've done nothing but complain ever since you got here!"*

This man was trying to counter the lure of the world and thought that a monastery was the way to go – and in all seriousness, it might surprise you that at one time, it was thought that if you were a die-hard Christian and really wanted to love God and avoid the tug of this world, you had to withdraw yourself from society and live in isolation as a monk or a nun out in some desolate monastery.

Obviously, this approach, and other approaches like it have two problems. The first problem is that we have a nasty habit of bringing the world with us, and secondly, Jesus intended for us to be *in* the world – just not *of* the world, and that's what we are going to be talking about morning.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **1 John 2** and we will pick up where we left off starting with **verse 15**. The Apostle John says,

**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.**

In his previous words – and again, I need to remind you that he is writing to Christians here, John told them and us that we are to love God, as reflected in our obedience to Him, and we are to love God’s people. If you really want to know that you really know God – look there for the evidence. Love God and love God’s people. That sounds clear, it’s straight-forward, but here John suggests that our love can be misdirected – misdirected towards the **world** and the things in it – and John knows this to be true for he lives in the world too, and he says to these believers – you must stop loving the world.

That word “**world**” seems to be a favorite word of John, in fact, he uses it more than all the other New Testament writers combined, and before we can understand what John is saying to us, we first have to define what that word “**world**” actually means. In the Greek, the word “**world**” is “*kosmos*” which literally means “*order*” or “*arrangement*” and we get several English words from this Greek word “*kosmos*” to include the words “*cosmos*” – referring to a well-ordered universe, and “*cosmetics*” which apparently suggests that applying makeup is an attempt to bring order to things.

Now in regards to John’s use of the word “**world**” – it has several different meanings depending on its context. For example, it can be used to refer to God’s ordered creation – our physical world with its nature and its landscape of mountains and fields and the various bodies of water. **Is John telling us that we should not love God’s creation?** No, he’s not telling us that. We can love God’s creation in the sense that we recognize and enjoy its beauty and give God glory for it.

Another use of the word “**world**” speaks of humanity. **Is John suggesting that we should not love humanity – our fellow man?** Well, to suggest that would strike at the very heart of the gospel since we are told in **John 3:16** that God so loved the world – He loves humanity, so much so, that He sent His Son to redeem it.

**So then, what is John telling us? What world are we not to love?** In this context, the “**world**” refers to an organized system of values and viewpoints and attitudes that are hostile towards God. At its core, it’s a spiritual system – a deceptive

perspective dominated by Satan to influence our physical realm. It's a system that has no room for God, it rejects the truth found His word, it relishes what God calls sin, and it has no regard for God's people. That's the world that John is speaking of – it's this worldwide system that we live in, which we cannot love.

Yes, we can enjoy God's creation, and yes, we are to love people – that's why God left us in the world, but we can't have the world living in us. As Christians, we cannot give our affection and our devotion to this sinful, human-centered, corrupt, deceptive, and self-gratifying system called the “**world**” even though others around us may freely and openly embrace it.

John's command is “**Do not love the world nor the things in the world**” and then he tells us why. He says, “**If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**”

In other words, the reason we shouldn't love the world is that we can't love the world and God at the same time. We cannot love two things that are in total opposition to each other. Misdirected love for the world pushes out our love for God, and love for God pushes out our love for the world. As a ruling principle of life, those who are devoted to the world, regardless of what they may claim, cannot love God.

This is similar to what Jesus taught in **Matthew 6:24** when He said,

“**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.**”

In that context, Jesus was talking about wealth, but it's just as applicable to the world. God – not the world, must have the first place in a Christian's life, and if someone claims to love God, and yet their lifestyle resembles the sinful values and the viewpoints and the attitudes of this world, there is something wrong with their claim to love God – and if you notice, both Jesus and John make it clear – it's either/or – we can't have a little bit of God and a little bit of the world. We can't have it both ways.

*There is an interesting method used by hunters in Africa to catch monkeys. They slice a coconut in two, hollow it out, and in one half of the shell cut a hole just big enough for a monkey's hand to pass through. Then they place an orange in the other half of the coconut before fastening the two halves of the coconut shell back together. Finally, they secure the coconut to a tree with a rope, retreat into the jungle, and wait.*

*Sooner or later, an unsuspecting monkey swings by, smells the orange, and discovers its location inside the coconut shell. The monkey then easily slips his hand through the small hole, takes hold the orange, and tries to pull it through the hole. Of course, the orange won't come out – it's too big for the hole, but to no avail, the persistent monkey continues to pull and pull, never realizing the danger he is in.*

*While the monkey struggles with the orange, the hunters simply stroll in and capture the monkey by throwing a net over him. As long as the monkey keeps his fist wrapped around the orange, the monkey is trapped.*

*The crazy thing is the monkey could save its own life if it would just let go of the orange – but it rarely does, thinking it can have both the orange and its freedom at the same time – but it can't, and the orange becomes a deadly trap.*

Satan uses a similar method to lure many Christians. He tempts us to grasp after more and more things of this world – setting the trap whereby we love God less and less.

**So, what does this trap look like for us?** Well, John describes it in **verse 16**, and he says,

**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.**

In this verse, John explains why the misdirected love of the world will displace the love of God and he provides three general temptations experienced by us – that being the **lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life**. These are the oranges in the trap – the lures that have been used by Satan since the Garden of Eden – even attempted against Jesus in the wilderness, and they are still being effectively used today against the lost and against Christians.

**So, what does John mean by the lust of the flesh?** Well to answer that, we first have to understand what this word “**flesh**” means, and right off the bat I can tell you he is not talking about our physical body. The Greek word is “*sarx*”, and in this context, it focuses on our fallen nature, and it speaks of our tendency to take the normal desires that God has given us and to distort them and pervert them in a way that is opposed to God's will – and let me explain.

God created us with many natural desires that are legitimate if they are used in the way that God designed them. For example, we have a desire to eat and we have a

desire to rest. These are legitimate God-given desires – but we can distort and pervert them to indulge our fallen nature, and when we give into our fallen nature – eating turns into gluttony and resting becomes laziness.

The Apostle Paul spoke about the flesh in **Galatians 5** beginning with **verse 19**, and he gets a little more specific about it. He writes,

*<sup>19</sup> Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

I don't think this is an exhaustive list by any stretch of the means. It's only a sampling of what it looks like to give into the cravings of our fallen natures – doing those things – doing those deeds which are opposed to the will of God.

**As Christians, can we get tempted by the lust of the flesh?** Absolutely! There may be occasions where we backslide into these behaviors, but for those who live like this habitually and continually as a normal practice or walk of life – then they can know that the love of God is not in them.

Then we come to the **lust of the eyes** which I think is ramped up in these days and times, and that refers to anything that we see or visualize which entices us to want something we do not have. It's seen in greed, in envy, and in sexual lusts.

We may be perfectly content with what we have, but then we see what somebody else has and then suddenly our house, our car, our spouse, our job, our clothes, or our church isn't enough anymore. No longer content – we got to have what we don't have and this is why so many are drowning in debt.

Eve fell prey to this temptation – seeing that the fruit of the forbidden tree was good for food and a delight to her eyes. She had to have what she could not have. Achan gave into this when he saw the gold and silver that had been dedicated to the Lord, but wanted some of it for himself, and he took it so he could have it.

Jesus warned us about the lust of the eyes. In **Matthew 5:27-28**, He said,

*<sup>27</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; <sup>28</sup> but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Men – we are creatures of sight. We are stimulated visually, and we must especially be on guard here. Remember, it was King David’s eyes that led him to commit adultery with Bathsheba, and eventually murder her husband. It all started with his wandering eyes that allowed a sinful desire to enter in and take root.

One test to know if you are struggling with the lust of the eyes is to ask yourself what you enjoy looking at, because what your eyes fixate on, is what you end up wanting, which is why Job said in **Job 31:1 (NIV)**,

***“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.***

So, the lust of the flesh is a desire to *do* what we should not *do*, whereas the lust of the eyes is a desire to *have* what we do not or should not *have*. Then last but not least is the **boastful pride of life** – the desire to *be* something apart from the will of God.

Now, this one is different because it pertains to what we already have and we seek to be lifted up because we have it. The pride of life speaks of the person who seeks glory for themselves rather than for God. They boast of their power, and their possessions, their prestige, and their position in life. They operate purely on a self-centered level, seeking status and honor and praise, making themselves look greater than they really are, often at the expense of tearing other people down.

John says, none of this – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, nor the boastful pride of life comes from God. God is not the source – the world system dominated by Satan is the source.

Then John concludes his argument with **verse 17**, where he says,

**The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.**

I like the comments of John MacArthur. He said, some of you are saying, *“I can’t wait till the next election. I’ve got news for you: It’s not going to be any different.”* It’s still the same world – rotten to the core, from top to bottom, side to side, and front to back – and it’s all passing away. The system is disintegrating. It’s falling apart. It carries its own destruction, and those whose love is devoted to this world – they have placed their confidence in something that cannot and will not last.

There is nothing to hold onto here, **and as Christians, why should we?** Remember, this is not our home – our citizenship is in heaven, and for those who continue to do the will of God, to those who persevere in this world – their final destiny is to abide with God forever, which is the very definition of eternal life.

So, John's warning to Christians is clear – stop loving the world. That's his command because of what the world is, because of what it does, and because of who we are – children of God.

Now, there are several approaches to this passage, and sometimes it's taken to the extreme like our guy who joined the mute monastery to get away from it all. There are those who say they can't own a television or a computer or an iPhone, they can't go to movies, they can't dress up, they can't have a nice car or a house, and they must stay away from lost people – all to keep them from having any connection to the world.

**Is that what God really wants?** Absolutely not. We are to be *in* the world but not *of* the world, or said in another way, God's will for us is not *isolation* but rather *insulation*. We are to be salt and light, we are to bear witness for Christ in this world, and we can't do that if we avoid all aspects of life in this world.

God has placed us in this world to minister, and He expects us to use the things of this world properly, according to His design, and for His glory, but we have to be careful, we cannot flirt with this world, and we must stay on task.

*A man bought a new hunting dog. Eager to see how the dog would perform, the man took him out to track a bear. No sooner had they gotten into the woods than the dog picked up the trail. Suddenly he stopped, sniffed the ground, and headed in a new direction. He had caught the scent of a deer that had crossed the bear's path. A few moments later he halted again, this time smelling a rabbit that had crossed the path of the deer. On and on it went until finally the breathless hunter caught up with his dog, only to find him barking triumphantly down the hole of a field mouse.*

Sometimes Christians are like that hunting dog. We start out on the right trail, following Christ, but soon our attention is diverted to things of lesser importance. One pursuit leads to another until we've strayed far from our original task, and that's what Satan wants.

Every day we must renew our dedication to Christ or we can be drawn away by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life. We easily pick up another scent and follow another trail if we are not careful, and if that happens, we must admit our waywardness to God, accept His forgiveness, and then ask Him to put us back on the right trail.

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