

BOOK OF I JOHN

Lesson Four

True Christians Avoid The Love of The World, Reject False Teachers, and Abide In the Truth

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides for ever. Little children, it is the last time: and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But you have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written unto you because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denies the Father and the Son. Whosoever denies the Son, the same has not the Father: [but] he that acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Let that therefore abide in you which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which you have received of Him abides in you, and you need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in Him.” I John 2:15-27

John has carefully exposed the false teachers by testing their claims with that of apostolic Christianity. The false teachers had once been a part of the Christian community known as the church. John has tested their theological beliefs and found them to be false. He tested their moral behavior and found it to be inadequate. He tested their social life of love and found it to be lacking. He concluded they were not Christians and were still in darkness.

While exposing the apostates, John was careful to not question the spiritual status of his readers. He believed they had experienced the forgiveness of sins, that they possessed an intimate knowledge of God,

and that through the Word, they possessed the strength to overcome the wiles of the wicked one. They had fellowship with God and loved their fellow Christians.

Love not the World - vs. 15-17

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides for ever.”

Now John, as a good pastor, changes the topic, as well as the mood. The topic is no longer assurance, but warning. The mood is that of command and duty. It is expressed as ***“love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.”*** He gives two reasons for not loving the world. One, love for the world and love for the Father cannot co-exist. Two, love invested in the world will not last since the world is passing away.

There are two words that are important if we are to understand this portion of scripture. They are *“world”* and *“love.”* John used the term *“world”* more than all the other New Testament writers together. It appears 185 times in the New Testament, of which 105 occur in the writings of John (78 times in his Gospel, 24 times in his letters, and 3 times in Revelation). But John uses it with a variety of meaning and often moves from one meaning to the next without explaining his meaning. The role of the Bible interpreter is to examine the context to discover his meaning.

The Greek word is *“kosmos.”* Its general meaning is an *“orderly arrangement; organization.”* It is translated *“adornment”* one time in I Peter 3:3. There it refers to a woman’s clothing arrangement. The word has seven or eight different meanings of which we will only refer to four. It sometimes means the physical universe or planet. ***“God that made the world (universe) and all things therein.”*** (Acts 17:27). It also describes the human world of mankind. ***“For God so loved the world.”*** (John 3:16). It is used in reference to this present temporal life. ***“Jesus said, ‘As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’”*** (John 9:5). In one verse alone, John uses it in three ways. In John 1:10, we read ***“He was in the world (temporal life), and the world (universe) was made by him and the world (sinful humanity) knew him not.”***

John’s use of the word here in I John 2:15-17 is in an entirely different sense. Here it refers to Satan’s organized system of opposing Christ’s kingdom work here on earth. It is the very opposite of what is holy,

spiritual and godly. John clearly defines his usage of the word over in I John 5:19 where he says, **“And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness.”** Jesus called Satan **“the prince of this world.”** (John 12:31). Unsaved people belong to **“this world.”** Jesus calls them **“the children of this world.”** (Luke 16:8). These unsaved people, whether they realize it or not, are energized by **“the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience”** (Ephesians 2:2). Just as the Holy Spirit uses people to promote the kingdom of Christ, so Satan uses people to promote his kingdom. Christ’s kingdom is built upon humility and servitude to God’s will, while Satan’s kingdom is built upon pride and dominion in the exercise of self-will. The kingdoms of this world are built upon achieving authority over others. Jesus said in Mark 10:42, **“Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.”**

All the kingdoms of this world are organized upon and under the control of Satan’s kingdom. Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness by offering Him **“all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them.”** (Matthew 4:8). A Christian is a member of the human world, and lives in a physical world, but does not belong to the spiritual world that is Satan’s system for opposing God. Jesus said in John 15:18, **“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.”**

In our everyday conversation, we use the word **“world”** in the sense of a system. When the TV announcer says **“We now turn to the world of sports,”** he or she is not talking about some separate planet, but is referring to an organized system made up of people, ideas, activities, and plans. It is an invisible system that **“keeps things going.”** In John’s thinking, the world is the invisible spiritual system opposed to God and Christ.

The second word in our text that needs to be understood is the word, **“love.”** The word is **“agape”** and is the same word used back in 2:10 in reference to loving the brethren. But here it must mean something different than what it did in verse 10. How are we to understand these expressions of **“love”** and **“love not?”**

We do so by distinguishing the two ways in which we give meaning to love. In verse 10, it refers to loving other people. There it signifies an outgoing care and compassion. It is the kind of love which is concerned for the benefit of the person or thing loved. Meanwhile here in verse 15, love is viewed as the pleasure that the person hopes to receive from the object of his love. To love, in this sense, is to be attracted to someone or something so as to enjoy it. The idea is of desire or appetite and is concerned about self-gratification. The statement, **“I love ice cream,”** is an example of this.

It should be emphasized that the desire for pleasure or self-gratification is not necessarily selfish and wrong. We are created by God with appetites and desires which need to be satisfied, and the satisfying of them produces pleasure. God Himself received pleasure when He looked upon His new creation and saw that **“it was good.”** We are also told to trust **“in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.”** (1 Timothy 6:18). However, a desire can be sinful and evil if it violates a precept of God. From this, in John’s sense, to love the world is to love what is opposed to God by definition. Love for the world and love for the Father are incompatible and cannot co-exist. To put it in the words of James 4:4, **“Know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”**

In verse 16, John lists three ingredients that drive this worldly outlook and “keeps it going!” They are the (1) lust of the flesh; (2) lust of the eyes; (3) pride of life. These are the same three ingredients to which Eve was exposed to in the Garden of Eden when Satan introduced his kingdom to her. (Genesis 3). They are also the same as he used to tempt Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4). To what do these refer?

In the past, Christians have compiled lists of things not to do in order to avoid becoming worldly. These have included things such as don’t go to movies, don’t dance, don’t smoke or drink alcoholic beverages, don’t play cards, don’t listen to secular music, don’t let your hair grow long if you are a man, and don’t cut your hair, wear makeup or jewelry if you are a woman. Now these actions may or may be wise to participate in but they do not get to the root of worldliness. While the fruit of worldliness is manifested in actions, the root of worldliness exists in attitudes.

John lists three dominant attitudes that drive or energize the worldly minded person. Remember, the world is a system of living based on self-gratification. With that to go on, John now gives the first of three human desires flowing out of the root of man’s selfish fallen nature. He calls it **“the lust of the flesh.”** In this context, flesh does not refer to the human body, but to the entire moral nature of man separated from and opposed to God. It is an attitude that seeks independence of God through the means of self-sufficiency. It is a desire to always be in control of one’s life and plans so that one’s own way is always coming to pass. It can best be expressed in the attitude of **“getting my own way.”**

The second human desire is described as **“the lust of the eyes.”** This is an attitude originating in the mind that sees certain goals and objects as being necessary or desirable to accomplish one’s own way! It can be expressed in the attitude of **“getting everything I want.”**

The third human desire is expressed as being the **“pride of life.”** The word **“life”** refers to things that are used to support life, namely what one possesses. The word **“pride”** is a reference to boasting. Together, the words describe a braggart who exaggerates about what he possesses in order to impress others. It can be expressed in the attitude of **“exalting my reputation above others.”**

So in order to achieve self-gratification, the worldly-minded person always seeks to get his own way, get all the things he wants, in order to produce a status symbol of importance over that of others.

John lists two reasons for not loving this worldly lifestyle: (1) You cannot love God and the world at the same time; (2) The world and its lusts or desires are temporal and passing away. (vs. 15, 17).

Rejecting False Teachers - vs. 18 - 23

“Little children, it is the last time: and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But you have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written unto you because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denies the Father and the Son. Whosoever denies the Son, the same has not the Father: [but] he that acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”

In verses 18-28, John identifies the apostate teachers of whom he has been warning his readers. They are those who have left the fellowship of apostolic belief. He refers to them as antichrists. The term **“antichrist”** is used only by John in I John 2:18, 22; 4:3; II John 7. The prefix **“anti”** can have two meanings. First, that of opposition, and second, that of substitution. So antichrist can refer to something or someone who is openly opposed to Christ, or it can mean someone or something that stands in the place of Christ, thus becoming a counterfeit Christ. The antichrists of whom John speaks came out of the ranks of the believers. In verse 19, he says **“they went out from us,”** that is, they who at one time professed apostolic doctrine, now were rejecting John and his teachings. The expression, **“went out”** is the same verb that described the departure of Judas from the disciples on the night of Jesus’ betrayal. In John 13:30 we read, **“he . . . went out and it was night.”**

The antichrists of whom John speaks are not evil spiritual creatures, but are the false teachers or false prophets which he refers to later on in 4:1-3: ***“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know you the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”***

John asserts that the falling away of these individuals proved them to be false brethren who had never truly shared in the same spiritual fellowship with that of John’s readers. A true union with Christ will manifest itself by abiding in Him. The perseverance of the saints is a Biblical doctrine. While the saints perseverance rests upon their preservation by Christ, the evidence of Him preserving them is their abiding perseverance to apostolic doctrine and practice. While it is Christ who began a good work in them and will bring that work to completion (Philippians 1:6), it is the ongoing maintaining of that good work which provides the evidence that the good work was ever begun. The believer’s present and future faithfulness gives evidence of an experience having begun with Christ in the past.

In light of the preceding context, the people who love the world and its desires, have placed themselves in opposition to the spirit of Christ and His kingdom, namely by lack of the humility and service to others. In its place they are promoting a counterfeit Christian message that has an appeal to those still under the control of Satan’s worldly kingdom. In I John 4:5, John identifies the spirit of the message that the false teachers proclaim. He says, ***“they are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world hears them.”*** The message of Satan’s kingdom promotes a spirit of pride and dominion. While claiming to advance the kingdom of Christ, it replaces the spirit of Christ with the spirit of the world, and the world embraces it as a form of godliness, but are strangers to the power therein (II Timothy 2:5).

John lists three marks that identify a false prophet or an antichrist.

- (1) They do not love apostolic Christianity and thus depart from the fellowship of believers (I John 2: 18, 19);
- (2) They deny the faith expressed by apostolic Christianity (I John 2:22-25);
- (3) They try to seduce or deceive those faithful to apostolic Christianity (I John 2:26).

When one investigates the history of the false cults and the antichrist religious systems in today’s world, you quickly discover that in most cases their founders were formerly members of an orthodox local church or denomination. They were “with us” but “not of us,” so they went out “from us” and started their own rival group and claim to represent true Christianity!

The reality of seeing professing Christians apostatize from the faith was not something that should have surprised the community of believers. It was something that was to characterize the age known as the last time or hour. The phrase “*the last time*” appears only this one time in the entire New Testament. It does seem to be equivalent to the expressions, “*the last days*” or these “*last times*” used elsewhere in Scripture (Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2; II Timothy 3:1).

What does John mean when he refers to the “last time?” Some Bible teachers believe that he was referring to the final days just before the return of Jesus. This cannot be true because John believed that he and his readers were then living in the last time. Nearly two thousand years of history have expired since John wrote the epistle. The correct view is that the last time refers to the entire church age beginning with the first coming of Christ and ending with His second coming. But the primary idea conveyed in the term, “*last time*” is not a duration of time but a kind of time. It refers to a certain quality of time rather than a quantity of time. What are the things that were to characterize the age of the Messiah? It was to be an age in which the light of His truth would now be shining and the past age of darkness would be passing away. (1 John 2:8). But at the same time, it would be a perilous time with many leaving the faith. This apostasy would ultimately manifest in either the appearance of a remarkable person of influence known as the Antichrist, or else a principle of belief.

In either case the person or principle associated with the antichrist will be a form of apostate Christianity, which is opposed to apostolic Christianity. It will result in a dominant form of counterfeit Christianity that will make true believers feel they are in the minority. John says we know we are living in the Messianic age because the apostasy has already begun.

After identifying his opponents as those who have left the apostolic fellowship of believers, John now, for the first time, gives the primary error of the apostates. In verse 22, he says they deny that Jesus is the Christ. To deny that Jesus was the Christ meant they denied that Jesus, the Son of God enjoyed an eternal relationship with God the Father. They thus denied the incarnation of God the Son in human flesh (cf. I John 4:3, 15). John calls anyone who denies Christ in this fashion as the (definite article) antichrist and the liar. This gives weight to the belief that the antichrist is a principle characterizing an apostate rather than some particular person.

Abiding In the Truth - vs. 24-27

“Let that therefore abide in you which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which you have received of Him abides in you, and you need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in Him.”

How were John’s readers to respond to the false teachings of these antichrists? By continuing to believe the truths of the gospel message which they had already learned. Six times in verses 24 - 28, John uses the words, “abide,” “remain,” and “continue.” Rather than accepting the new novel ideas of the false teachers, the readers were to permanently hold to the doctrine of the one eternal God, who in His Son incarnated Himself in a human body, lived a life of sinless obedience, died for the sins of others that He might be the Savior of the world. By continuing to believe these teachings, they could be assured that they possessed the eternal life promised by God to believers. In doing so, they could overcome those who were seducing them or leading them astray.

John is assured that his readers will be enabled to discern the spirit of truth from the spirit of error because at their conversion they had been anointed or consecrated by the Holy Spirit to so learn the truth of the gospel, that they would not need additional human teachers to come along side them to lead them into the truth. They already possessed the truth in the true belief of the gospel. Hold on to the truth, buy the truth and sell it not! It is a life and death, heaven and hell issue! To embrace the belief that Jesus is not the Christ, God in the flesh, is to reject a saving relationship with the Father and His Son.

In these verses (15-17), John has asserted that true Christians will not love the world, they will reject false teachers who deny the Son of God (18-23), and they will abide in the truth of the gospel (19-27).