

Dangerous Love

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[0:00] The last time we studied 1 John on Wednesday, we looked at 1 John 2, 12-14, and these verses cover the various stages of spiritual growth.

! Regardless of our current stage, verse 12 clearly showed that all believers had their sins forgiven. Remember 1 John 2, 12, it says, I write to you little children because your sins are forgiven you for his namesake.

The word little children there in verse 12 is general for offspring of any age. Remember that John is old by this time, so to him, just about everybody in the church is a little child.

But the first and foremost fundamental word of encouragement that John could give everybody is that they were forgiven of their sins in the past, and this forgiveness remains effective in their lives. So they've come to know God as their Heavenly Father, and as a result, they're part of God's family. So in addition to looking at the verses in 1 John, we covered several other verses that define what spiritual growth is.

[1:10] And drawing from these verses, we summarized spiritual growth like this. We said, Spiritual growth is a process of taking in the truth of God and growing on the basis of believing and responding to that truth.

Spiritual growth is directly related to an increase in your understanding of God's revelation. As we increase our understanding of God's revelation, then, and apply that understanding to our lives, we become more and more like Him.

In tonight's passage, we're going to see John return to the subject of love. And several months ago, when we studied 1 John 2, 7 through 11, we saw the test of love.

Just for some review, listen to 1 John 2, 10 and 11. They summarize the type of love that we should have for fellow believers. 1 John 2, 10 says, He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

But he who hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. So that passage introduces whom we should love.

[2:14] And John is going to expand on the theme of proper Christian love later in the letter. Tonight's passage, though, tells us about a dangerous love. And it's a dangerous love that we should avoid.

So let's go ahead and read 1 John 2, 15 through 17. Those three verses say, 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.

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, that he who does the will of God abides forever.

Before we look at the passage in detail, we need to define two key terms in the verses. Do you have an idea of what those terms might be? The first one we need to define is love.

And love here signifies affection and devotion. God, not the world, must have the first place in the Christian's life. So Jesus himself made the importance of affection and devotion very clear.

[3:20] Listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 10, 37 through 39. Jesus said, As I'm sure you've already deduced, the second term we need to define is world.

And the New King James has it listed six times in the three verses that we're looking at. So anytime you see a word listed six times in three verses, it's probably pretty important.

So that in itself tells us that we should focus on the word. And we should factor in that the person who just told us not to love the world is the same person who wrote John 3, 16. And we all remember John 3, 16.

That, of course, is the verse that says, For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. So before we get into the verses themselves tonight, we're going to first make sure we understand how verses like John 3, 16 can and do coexist in perfect harmony with verses like tonight's passage.

And in John 3, 16, world means people. So the Son's mission is bound up in the supreme love of God for the evil, sinful world of humanity, in the sense he's talking about people there.

[4:55] And, of course, we know those people are in rebellion against him. And when it talks about God so loving the world, the word so emphasizes the intensity or greatness of his love.

We know that his love was great because the Father gave his unique and beloved Son to die on behalf of sinful men. We talked about this several months ago on a Wednesday night, but remember that God so loved the world was an astounding statement in that context because the Old Testament and other Jewish writings had spoken only of God's love for the people of Israel. And God's love for the world made it possible for whoever believes in Christ, not just Jews alone, to have eternal life. God's love for the world led to specific actions because he gave his only Son. And John elsewhere explains this as sending Jesus to earth as a man to suffer and die and thereby bear the penalty of our sins. In our text tonight, though, world is not a reference to people. World is a reference to the spiritual system of evil that's dominated by Satan and all that it offers in opposition to God, his word, and his people. World here is the morally evil system that is opposed to all that God is and holds dear.

[6:10] And in this sense, world is the satanic system opposing Christ's kingdom on this earth. Outside of the Bible, we still use the word of God's love for the world.

World in the same way to refer to a system. We talk about the business world, for example. We also talk about the sports world. And when somebody is talking about the business world, we know the person is talking about the system rather than all the people that may be involved in business. So the same concept applies here in this passage. So as we go through our text tonight, remember that world means the world system, which is the organized system headed by Satan, which leaves God out and is in opposition to God.

So here's one way to summarize how John 3.16 and tonight's passage coexist. We love the people of the world, but we do not love the sinful attitudes and values they may embrace.

Once again, we love the people of the world, but we do not love the sinful attitudes and values that they embrace. Believe it or not, all of that was actually introduction.

[7:45] So we're going to cover tonight's text in more detail now by looking at each of the verses one at a time. And the first thing that John states is the command. So for those of you filling out blanks, command goes there.

And in honor of Pastor Don, the points will be illiterate tonight if you want to go ahead and fill in the seat for the first letter of each of the points. But we see the command in verse 15.

John says, 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. Based upon what we discussed just a minute ago, we could paraphrase the verse like this.

We could say, Do not love the spiritual system of evil dominated by Satan and all that it offers in opposition to God, his word, and his people. This system leaves God out. If anyone loves the morally evil system opposed to all that God is and holds dear, the love of the Father is not in him. So does the background and then that paraphrase help clarify a little bit about what John is talking about when he refers to the world in these verses? In a sense, love is neutral.

[8:56] So for those of you filling in the blanks, in a sense, love is neutral. The object of our love or affection is what is decisive. So love is neutral, but the object of our love or affection is decisive.

So we have to be careful then that this love is going in the right direction and that it acts in a manner consistent with a Christian's confession. John's not the only biblical writer that expressed a similar warning.

Think about James 4.4. In James 4.4, James said, Adulterers and adulteresses, Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? So the difference between the world and God is so vast that as we move toward the world, we alienate ourselves from God.

In the world, sin is considered acceptable and pleasurable. Ultimately, believers lose their awareness of sin and thus sin becomes habitual if you move toward the world.

So James and John's concern is not for occasional sins, but for the attitude of heart that leads a person to turn his back on God and turn his face to the world instead of turning his face toward God. [10:10] Paul's another writer who had a similar idea. Listen to Philippians 3.20 and 21. Paul said, And of course, if our citizenship is in heaven, we can't be a citizen of the world.

So we've already seen that John's comments here in 1 John 2.15 are consistent with what? James and Paul wrote. Even more importantly, John's comments are consistent with what Jesus said on the subject.

Listen to Jesus' comments in Matthew 6.19-21. He said, Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And then just a couple of verses down in Matthew 6.24, Jesus adds, No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and mammon. So obviously, Jesus was clear that it's an either-or situation. You either love the world or you love God.

[11:44] And in 1 John 2.15, John charges us to love neither the world in general nor the things specific to the world in particular. So the command is comprehensive. Our allegiance can't be divided.

It must be focused and specific on God. So the correct application of love springs from the fact that the believer has a singular loyalty and commitment to God.

And 1 John 2.15 states clearly that you can't love the world and love God at the same time. So the absolute nature of the statement is striking, and so it should really make us think about what it is that we really give our attention to.

Obviously, the stakes are high because the Father's kingdom is at war with the kingdom of this world, so the two will never coexist peacefully. And to pledge allegiance to one side, then, is to declare opposition to the other.

So far, we've spent almost all the time in this verse looking at the first sentence. So let's look at the second sentence of the verse now. It says, If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

[12:48] And when John says the love of the Father, some people wonder whether he's talking about God's love for us or our love for God. And you'll find biblical scholars on either side of that question, but the context leads me to favor the interpretation that John is talking about our love for God.

Because if we love the world, we're not loving God, and we already know that we cannot love the world and love God at the same time. We've already seen that concept illustrated in the various cross-references that we've covered.

John is saying that if we love the world, then we cannot love the Father like we should. We've heard the command in verse 15. We'll go on to verse 16 now.

And in that verse, John gives us the clarification. Clarification is what we see in verse 16. In other words, John explains why obeying the command is so important.

Verse 16 says, 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. How much gray area does John leave in that verse?

[14:01] He doesn't leave any at all. How much of what is in the world is from God, according to him? He says in there that all that is in the world is not of the Father, but is of the world.

And the condemnation there of everything that is in the world is not a declaration that the world created by God is evil. We know from other passages in Scripture that John fully embraced the doctrine of the goodness of creation that's taught in Genesis 1 and 2.

Instead, John is saying that humanity and its sinfulness has followed evil rather than good. And like Paul, he said they have worshipped the created things rather than the creator.

So the problem is not that God created the material things of the world. The problem is that people have made the material things of the world into idols, and they made them a substitute then for worshiping God.

Remember that the world is the system of values and goals from which God is excluded. So in describing everything in the world, John specified its contents under three well-known phrases that

effectively highlight the world's false outlook.

[15:04] John talks about the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. And so we're going to look at each category here. First, though, we need to discuss the meaning of the word that's translated as lust.

So the original word translated as lust can be used to describe both positive and negative human desires. There are several places in the Bible where lust can be a positive, but here, John is focusing in the negative sense.

And most often in the Bible, the word lust is used in the negative sense. Here in these verses, John uses the term negatively to describe a strong desire for evil things. So the first thing that John talks about is the lust of the flesh.

So that's where we are in our handout. Lust of the flesh goes in those blanks for you there. And the lust of the flesh refers to sinful, sensual pleasure. So John emphasizes the tendency of human beings to fulfill the natural desires they have that are contrary to God's will.

That's where we need to remember that we're not sinful because we sin. We sin because we're sinful. And in that, John includes anything and any way in which humans improperly fulfill fleshly desires.

[16:17] So that can include overeating, drunkenness, anything related to a fleshly desire. That gets in the way of our worship of God. The second thing he talks about is the lust of the eyes.

So the lust of the eyes is next. And that refers to covetousness or materialism. Satan often uses the eyes as a strategic avenue to incite wrong desires among people.

So let's look at a few examples from throughout the Old and New Testament of how what people see encourages them to sin. Think about Achan in the Old Testament.

He's the one who sinned by stealing some of the items from Jericho that God had forbidden the Israelites from taking. Listen to Achan's words in Joshua 7, 20 and 21.

It says, Also consider David's sin with Bathsheba.

[17:41] 2 Samuel 11, 2 says this. It says, Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing. And the woman was very beautiful to behold.

So once again, from the roof, David saw Bathsheba. So we see the eyes again causing a problem. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 5, 27 through 29.

He said, You have heard that it was said of old, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell. So do you think Jesus understood that what we see can entice us to sin?

Of course, Jesus knew that eyes were involved in the very first sin. Listen to Genesis 3, 6. It says, So once again, Eve saw that the tree was good for food and pleasant to the eyes.

[18:58] So the desire of the eyes then can be understood as the tendency to be captivated by the outward show of things without inquiring into their real values. So all of these temptations of the world focus on enjoyment in the present without an analysis or understanding of future ramifications.

So we really must think about how an action or its value compares with the worth of eternal things that come from God. We always have to factor that in when we think about what to do in this life.

And the last category that John condemns is the pride of life. And the pride of life refers to being proud about one's position in this world. The phrase has the idea of arrogance over one's circumstances, which can produce haughtiness or exaggeration.

And it also has the idea of parading what one possesses can impress other people. So arrogance and pride can overtake us when we try to get ahead of the Joneses and when we rely on ourselves rather than God for our material positions or worldly position.

So once again, we need to be careful about relying on ourselves and relying on our material possessions and our worldly position instead of relying on God. And going back to James, James sounds familiar to John in this regard too.

[20:15] He said that now you boast in your arrogance, all such boasting is evil. And that is James 4:16. James didn't mention any words there either when he said all such boasting is evil.

Going back to 1 John 2.16, one commentary paraphrased the verse like this. It said, When you live for getting your own way and for getting everything you want, and for looking good compared to others, you are not living for God, but for the world.

So when you live for getting your own way and for getting everything you want, and for looking good compared to others, you are not living for God, but for the world. So maybe it's just me that so far the verses have been somewhat depressing.

Anybody else kind of feel that way too? We've spent almost all of this time talking about what we should avoid doing. And in verse 17, we see the conclusion to this section.

So John's conclusion tells us why we should heed the command to avoid loving the world. In verse 17, John said, And the world is passing away, and the lust of it, that he who does the will of God abides forever.

[21 : 27] So what does John say will happen to the world? It's passing away. So the satanic world system, because of its temporary nature, is in the continual process of disintegration.

It's headed for destruction. So to be consumed with this life, then, is to be unprepared for the next. But what does John say will happen to someone who does the will of God?

It says that that person will abide forever. So the life lived in God's fellowship, which rejects the sinful things of this passing world, is a life that has no real ending.

A person whose character and personality are shaped by obedience to God will be unaffected by the passing away of the world and its vain desires. So we see a contrast, then, between the outcomes of these two loves, two lives, and two orientations toward life.

When compared with the life lived in the will of God, the things that this life had to offer are really empty imitations of God's best. So the things of this world seem to be of great value, but they're worthless when compared to the eternal blessings that come from doing the will of God.

[22 : 37] Think about Jesus and his death and resurrection, because in his death and resurrection, he's defeated the world that is opposed to God, and he's secured eternal life for those who believe.

So John links the believer's confession of faith to his conduct by using the phrase, He who does the will of God abides forever. And, of course, that describes who's going to be part of God's kingdom. The idea of doing the will of God is closely linked to Jesus' mission in the Gospel of John, because on several occasions in the Gospel of John, Jesus explained that he only takes action in accordance with the Father's will.

So it's likely that John here is exhorting the readers to live like Jesus lived when he was on the earth, that is, to be solely focused on doing the will of the Father. So let's take just a minute and look at some of the occasions where Jesus talked about only doing things in accordance with God's will.

Here's John 6.38. He says, For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And then in 6.39 and 40, Jesus continues by adding these words.

[23 : 48] He says, For this is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all he has given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Think also about Jesus' words in his prayer in the garden just before he was arrested. We're actually going to go to Luke for that. Listen to Luke 22.41 and 42. In Luke 22.41 and 42, we find these words.

It says, And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw. And of course, they're talking about Jesus here. It says, And he knelt down and prayed, saying, Father, if it is your will, take this cup from me.

Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. So we've looked at several cross-references tonight to see how John's words in our text are consistent with the rest of Scripture that we've yet to hear in cross-reference from Peter out of all the ones that we've listened to.

So let's bring Peter in to support John's comments that the world is passing away, that the ones who abide in God will live forever. This is 2 Peter 3, verses 10 through 13.

[25 : 00] Peter says, But the day of the Lord will come as if deep 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, in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and

hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.

Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. So obviously, Peter talks about the world passing away, because he says, We're looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, and all the elements will melt with fervent heat.

So of course, that lines up perfectly with this world passing away. So once again, as with nearly all sections of 1 John, the application of tonight's passage is clear. First, we are to love what God loves.

So we are to love what God loves. Then, we are to hate what God hates. So we should love what God loves, and we should hate what God hates.

[26:14] And finally, we should abide forever by doing God's will. So love what God loves, hate what God hates, and abide forever by doing God's will.

And I put the J.B. Phillips paraphrase in your handout tonight. He paraphrased the three verses this way. He said, Never give your hearts to this world or to any of the things in it.

A man cannot love the Father and love the world at the same time. For the whole world system, based as it is on man's primitive desires, their greedy ambition, and the glamour of all that they think splendid, is not derived from the Father at all, but from the world itself.

The world and all its passionate desires will one day disappear, but the man who is following God's will is part of the permanence and cannot die. So to use a more literal translation, we go back to the actual wording of verse 17 in the New King James, The world is passing away, and the lust of it, that he who does the will of God abides forever.

Thank you.