

**Love the Father, not the World**

1 John 2:15-17

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Sheldon and Jean discovered true, deep love. They didn't just dream about it. They lived it. They got married, crossed oceans and together began a search for the Christian faith. At Oxford, they met C.S. Lewis and through his influence became believers. But then Jean fell prey to a mysterious illness. Soon, much sooner than they both anticipated, she was gone. Sheldon was left behind to pick up the pieces. He began to travel that road of life apart from the one he deeply loved.

He turned to his friend C.S. Lewis. They began to correspond with letters. Through these Sheldon expressed some of the love that he and Jean discovered and experienced. In one letter, the killer of love and how to fight it, he talks about what kills love.

*The killer of love is creeping separateness. Inloveness is a gift, but then it is up to the lovers to cherish or to ruin. Taking love for granted, especially after marriage. Ceasing to do things together. Finding separate interests. 'We' turning into 'I'. Self. Self-regard: what I want to do. Actual selfishness only a hop away. This was the way of creeping separateness. And in the modern world, especially in the cities, everything favoured it. The man going off to his office; the woman staying home with the children – her children – or perhaps having a different job. The failure of love might seem to be caused by hate or boredom or unfaithfulness with a lover; but those were results. First came creeping separateness: the failure behind the failure.*

Then he writes about how he and Jean fought against creeping separateness. *What emerged from our talk was nothing less, we believed, than the central 'secret' of enduring love: sharing. 'Look,' we said, 'what is it that draws two people into closeness and love? Of course there's the mystery of physical attraction, but beyond that it's the things they share. We both love strawberries and ships and collies and poems and all beauty, and all those things bind us together. Those sharings just happened to be; but what we must do now is share everything. Everything! If one of us likes anything, there must be something to like in it – and the other one must find it. Every single thing that either of us likes. That way we shall create a thousand strands, great and small, that will link us together. Then we shall be so close that it would be impossible – unthinkable – for either of us to suppose that we could ever recreate such closeness with anyone else. And our trust in each other will not only be based on love and loyalty but on the fact of a thousand sharings – a thousand strands twisted into something unbreakable.'* Sheldon Vanauken – *A Severe Mercy*

So Sheldon and Jean fought against the creeping separateness that threatened their love by sharing everything and deeply investing in one another for as long as they had life together. There's some wisdom in his words for our relationships. Some of us are currently in a love relationship with our spouse, fiancée, boyfriend or girlfriend. Some are not. But any Christian here is in another love relationship –with God.

How close are you and God these days? Have you been creating strands of connection between you and God to strengthen the bond between you? Or have you allowed creeping separateness to go on for so long that now you are far apart? As Vanauken points out, if we keep working on strands that will link us together with the one we love, it becomes unthinkable to imagine breaking all those strands and creating such closeness with another. But if we neglect these strands and drift apart, it's much easier to fall into the arms of another. For the Christian, this other love is the world and it's ways.

“Who do you love; God or the world? The Apostle John raises this issue of love in his letter we now call First John. But he doesn't raise it in the form of a question. For the first time in this letter, he writes a command. It goes like this. **Love the Father, not the World.** But that's easy to write. How do you do it? What's involved in it? Does it really have to be such an either or proposition?

Today, we have opportunity to think about and reflect upon our love relationship with God. I want to give you answers to some questions this command raises for us. What is love? What is the world? Why is John making such a big deal out of this? How might we take up the fight to develop that deeper, stronger love bond with God so that loving the world would become unthinkable to us?

1 John 2:15-17, ESV

**15** 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 of life—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.

John has just finished reminding believers of blessings they experience with God. Your sins are forgiven. You know Him who is from the beginning. You are strong in the Lord. God's Word lives in you. You have overcome the evil one. But now with these great blessings in mind, John urges his readers to take up the fight.

So we discover the first command of this letter. “Do not love the world or the things of the world.” There must be conflict with the world if the soul is to grow up into Christ.

**What is love? Our deepest affection joined with our steady devotion.** This is our deepest soul love – our deepest affection. But it is not just that deep feeling. It is demonstrated by “a steady devotion to something or someone.” You can feel love towards someone or something but never do anything about it. So this love involves both affection and decision. It includes feelings and action.

**What is the world?** The word is “kosmos” in Greek. John uses it to refer to “**Human society, controlled by the power of evil, organized in opposition to God.**” The world is “the moral order, especially human beings, in massive rebellion against God their maker.” The Kosmos is “the life of human society organized under the power of evil.”

John will have much more to say about the world as we proceed through his letter. In 3:1, he declares *the world* is a realm that will not recognize Christ. In 3:13 he tells us *the world hates* those who follow Christ. In 4:1, *the world* is shot through with the influence of dangerous deceivers like false prophets. The spirit of the anti-Christ and the evil one are *in the world* according to 4:3,4. *The world* is the stronghold of those who ignore the apostle’s testimony according to 4:5. While the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world, this saving work consists in equipping believers to “*overcome the world*” in (5:4-5). John ends his letter by declaring in 5:19, “*the whole world is under control of the evil one.*” This understanding is what John has in mind when he states “Do not love the world.”

When defined like this, it gives even greater punch to that all too familiar verse from John 3:16. For God so loved *the world* – God loved this wretched, wicked, disgusting world and it remains the object of his saving activity.

**Why is John making such a big deal out of this?** Isn’t John overstating this a bit. What’s so bad about the world? Especially in Canada, we experience economic prosperity, political stability, material plenty and opportunity for education. Maybe John could not lighten up, but let us steer clear of such negativism and melodrama.

But think about the reality of the world. Someone nearly miscarries; someone else’s parents are dying; someone wonders if cancer has come back; someone struggles with sensory loss; another struggles with spiritual blindness; someone else’s children are not walking with the Lord. A family experiences disconnection from some friends leading to disillusionment. Someone else grieves. I didn’t just make up that list. These realities I learned about in people’s lives in the span of a few hours during one day of this past week. I was not out looking for evidence of death or

oppression or spiritual wandering or suffering. This world encroaches upon us from all directions at all times if we care to see.

This does not mean that we must say forget the world. Or “I need to hate the material world and everyone in it.” Or “we need to withdraw from everything in the world and live in a completely separate community.” There are reasons to dance and delight and enjoy in some places and times. Yet John reminds us to look around with spiritual eyes. Yes we see God’s creation, redemption and evidence of His work. But we also see this world system and structures and people who oppose God.

Robert Yarborough writes “John reminds us of the world’s underlying structure and destiny. The evil one is present, even dominant, wherever divine light is suppressed. People either conquer the world by the Son of God or the world conquers them. There is light and darkness, love and hate, salvation and perdition. Maybe we smile smugly that John doesn’t really understand life today. But perhaps we have lost John’s reflective sharpness regarding life’s daily deathliness and the barely restrained darkness that seeks to extinguish the light.”

John commands us to not give our loyalty to features of the world that would compromise our total devotion to God alone. He explains why in the latter half of verse 15.

Why is John making such a big deal about this? “If anyone loves the world **“The love of the Father is not in him/her. (2:15)** We cannot love both God and the World. When a person sets their affection on the world, it means that the Father’s love is not in that person. You cannot love the world and God at the same time. We can’t offer God a kind of multi-tasking love where we give Him some of our love and the world another part.

True love for God only exists when it has no rivals. There can only be one supreme object of our devotion. ‘No-one can serve two masters’ (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13), and if we cannot serve God and money, neither can we love the Father and the world. Sheldon and Jean Vanauken experienced a deep love with each other because they devoted themselves to connecting more intimately with each other. When it came to loving a member of the opposite sex in that romantic, committed way, they devoted all that love to each other. They didn’t give any of the love meant for their spouse to anyone else. That’s how marriage is supposed to work. That’s how God designed it to work. We cannot love both God and the world.

Just like we cannot love multiple spouses. Well, what about the Bible characters who had multiple wives? The Lord never commends it. And it always leads to trouble. Think about what Abraham experienced because Sarah and Hagar; or Jacob with Leah and Rachel; or David who already had Abigail among other wives but still wanted Bath-Sheba. Solomon let his 700 wives steal his heart away from God. Just as our spousal love is reserved for that one special person, our core love must be reserved for God alone.

John says the one who fails to do this does not have the love of the Father in him/her. He forfeits the Father's love. That doesn't mean that they once had the father's love but then lost it because they loved the world. He means they forfeit or waste the opportunity presented by God's love offer. They fail to receive God's love in the first place. So they fail to be able to offer love to God in response. The love of the father is not in them if they love the world.

But **how do we know we love the world?** What might it look like for someone to love the world? John unveils this for us in verse 16. "For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world."

One way we can know that we love the world is by **giving into the desires of the flesh**. What do you think of when you hear that phrase – "desires of the flesh." Honestly. What are you thinking about? We probably immediately think of sex. That is certainly included. But he's talking about other desires that come from inside of us. The desires put in us are not bad. They were put there by God – the desire for sleep, food, significance, sex, relationship and safety are all there from God. John doesn't say "desires" are of the world. The desires *of the flesh* are from the world. So these are the cravings of sinful man or the desires of the sinful nature. They take a natural desire and warp it. Our sinful nature wants to satisfy natural desire outside of God's holy standards. So it's not just sex outside marriage. It includes greed, laziness and gluttony. And the way we use our time.

So take time for an example. Guys, men – we like to have time to do the things we like to do. But what happens to all your guy time when you get married or you start dating someone or you get engaged? You certainly still need time with the guys. But this desire can cross over into a desire of the flesh if we use time with the guys to avoid the responsibilities and demands of home. When we were newly married, I golfed a lot with my friends. One summer I think I golfed 30 times. I never got that good at it. But then our first child came along. She took up time; my golfing time. I was getting less and less time to golf with my friends. I struggled with that and began to pray. Lord help figure

out what life needs to look like now that I am a Dad. I remember reading about this pastor who golfed every Saturday with friends. He was gone for 6 hours leaving his wife and young kids at home. One Saturday, he was loading his golf clubs into his trunk. His little girl came running up to him and just started crying. “Daddy, please don’t go. Please Daddy, I need you. I miss you!” He stopped and told his friends to go on without him that day. He did not pick up his clubs for the next 20 years. Instead he invested that time with his wife and children while they were at home. Now I’m not saying that if you golf when you’re married you’re sinning. But golfing or going out at the expense of your wife and kids might be. Can you see how a natural desire can be used by our sinful nature and the invitations of this world to draw us away from our higher callings? One way we love the world is by giving in to the desires of our flesh.

Another way we love the world is to **give in to the desire of our eyes**. This involves seeing something. Then we want it and perhaps go after it without any consideration of Jesus’ will. The desires of our flesh come from within. The desires of the eyes come from without. You see this happen in the Bible when Eve saw the forbidden fruit; when Achan saw the spoils of Jericho; when David saw Bath-Sheba on the roof. Giving in to the desire of the eyes means our eyes search to get a glimpse of that forbidden, illicit thing. We give in to what the eyes itch to see.

This can happen when we go shopping - innocent activity. We go to a place and have no intention of spending anything. Then we see something. It’s appealing. We want it and we have the plastic card that moves that item from the store to our home in an instant. But is that what Jesus wants? I was talking with a lady on Thursday morning. I’d heard a sermon about her philosophy of shopping. She shared that when she goes shopping she takes Christ with her. When she considers a purchase she asks the Lord “do I really need this? Does someone else really need this?” Or am I just getting something because I’m tired of what I have? A trip to the mall can be a truly spiritual experience and battle. Malls are saturated with messages from the world. So we need to go with the intention of remaining true to our first love – God.

Another way we love the world is **the pride of life**. John’s words present us with a difficulty in translation. It can be translated pride of life or pride in possessions. But what does it mean to have pride of life? It seems like it involves boasting about what we have or do. It is an unhealthy pride in achievements or possession. It wants to feel important in the eyes of others so much so that we will ensure others know how important we are. People can even do this with their humility. They can be proud about how humble they are or frugal or efficient or skillful in getting deals.

So John has commanded his readers to not love the world or the things of the world. These things include the desire of the flesh, desire of the eyes and the pride of life. Why does John make such a big deal out of this? You can't love the Father and the world at the same time. He concludes this section with another reason why he's making such a big deal.

Loving in the world is a poor investment. **The world and its desires are passing away (2:17)**. We make a poor investment if we love the world. It won't last. We're giving ourselves to something that won't be here much longer. To love the world is like investing in rotary phones or vinyl records or floppy discs. They lasted for a while but have now passed away. This world system opposed to God is passing away. The darkness is fading and the light that dawned with Christ's coming is getting brighter.

Loving God is an eternal investment. **But the man or woman who does the will of God will live forever.** We might expect John to say but the man who loves God will live forever. Yet Jesus said, "if you love me, you will obey what I command." So when we obey or follow God's will, we love God.

Do not love the world or the things in this world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him/her. Maybe the Holy Spirit has revealed to you today that you love the world. You live for the world; you love the things of this world. You live to satisfy your desires however you can. Or to get more of what you see or to get more recognition. Your true love – your first love is this world. The love of the Father is not in you.

But there is a way to change all of this. Jesus used one word to call people to act on this stark reality – Repent. Turn from loving the world. Turn from that love to fulfill desires however you can. Turn from giving in to whatever you see. Turn from the pride of life. But this turning to Christ and loving Him wholeheartedly requires a change in our heart. We cannot do that heart surgery on ourselves. If you need a heart bypass or heart replacement, you cannot do it yourself. You need the heart specialist and their team to do it for you.

If you repent from living a world loving lifestyle, Jesus and the team of the Father and the Holy Spirit will do your heart surgery. They will give you that new heart – that desire to love the Father and not the world. They will give the new desire to take up the fight against just giving in to whatever our desires want to do; to fight against wanting everything you see and instead walk by faith. They will give you that new heart that develops contentment and humility

in life rather than the pride of life and possessions; a heart that does God's will and begins that journey to outliving the world and its desires. It begins with repentance. Will you repent from loving the world and turn to loving God?

Some of us who already know Christ may have drifted from him. We've experienced that creeping separateness. We need to turn from whatever we've allowed to bring separation between us and Him. We all need to continue in the journey of building those strands of connection with Christ. So we need to replace any misdirected love with God focused love. Instead of acting on the desires of the flesh, put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of wanting whatever we see, ask Jesus to empower us to walk by faith. Instead of the pride of life, we ask Jesus to grow in us humility and Godly contentment balanced with Godly ambition. Instead of a temporary "today only matters" perspective, we ask Jesus to give us that eternal perspective.

We started by asking the question how close to God are you these days? Now how close will you be in the days to come?