

## DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD; REMAIN IN HIM

1 John 2:15-27

Key Verse: 2:15

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.”

Today's passage is a warning to believers against loving the world and against antichrists. It teaches how to discern things of the world from things of God; and, who antichrists are; and, the truth from lies. At the same time, it strongly exhorts us to hold onto the gospel and remain in Jesus. Though we do not belong to the world, we live in the world. In the past, we just followed the pattern of the world. But after believing in Jesus, we live against these trends. Yet, we can still be influenced by the world. We must learn how to live in this world as God's children. Nevertheless, the words, “Do not love the world,” naturally arouse a rebellious feeling in our hearts. We may wonder if we should abandon everything and go live in a monastery. However, Jesus' prayer for believers was not to be taken out of the world but to remain in the world and be protected from the evil one (Jn 17:15). Jesus told his disciples, “You are the light of the world” (Mt 5:14a). Let us learn what “Do not love the world” means, and why we should not love the world. In addition, let us learn what we should do instead.

First, do not love the world (15-17). In verses 12-14 John had assured the believers that they are forgiven, in fellowship with God and victorious over the evil one. After giving great assurance, John also gave his dear children a warning. John knew that there was a hidden danger for them living in this world. So he said, “Do not love the world or anything in the world” (2:15a). Here “the world” does not refer to people or God's creation. In fact, Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...” (Jn 3:16). And Paul said, “Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1Ti 4:4). What then does the word “world” refer to? It is the realm that is opposed to God. This includes evil spirits, unbelieving and wicked people, and institutions under the control of Satan, who is the prince of this world (Jn 12:31; 1Jn 5:19).

In the phrase, “Do not love the world,” the word “love” is from the Greek “agapaō.” It is defined in Louw-Nida’s Greek English Lexicon as “a high regard for the value or importance” of something. This love is given to what we value supremely. We should not love most things that are less than God. It is normal to enjoy ice cream, like a new suit, or love our children or grandkids. But our love should be given in proportion to their worth or value. We should not love anything in the world in the place of God. It is similar to a warning against idol worship. Why is this warning necessary? There are many good things that attract us in the world. We need to know where they come from. Many things are God’s gifts to us. When we enjoy these things for his glory, this pleases God. But we should not become selfish and greedy. Paul says that greed is idolatry (Col 3:5). Some things are not from God. These things should be rejected. In Genesis 14, when Abraham returned from defeating the kings in war, the king of Sodom offered him all the goods he had recovered. But Abraham refused because they were not from God and he did not want to be bound to the world by accepting them. Simply speaking, we should love God more than anything else in the world. “Do not love the world” is an imperative; it is a command to be obeyed.

In verses 15b-17 we can find some reasons why we should not love the world. The first reason is stated in verse 15b: “If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.” Simply speaking, love for the world and love for God cannot coexist, as the darkness cannot coexist with the light. As Tim Keller has said, our modern counterfeit gods are money, sex and power. Many people think they can love these things together with God equally. But as we love these things, love for God disappears. Someone may think, “I am smart. I can love both God and money.” But as the word “anyone” indicates, there is no exception. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Mt 6:24). James 4:4 says, “friendship with the world means enmity against God.” Sometimes people feel that serving God is boring. So they look for fun in the ungodly world. This offends the Spirit of God living within, breaking fellowship with him. Then the spirit of this world occupies them. There can be no compromise. If anyone loves the world, they lose fellowship with God. On the other hand, if we love God, we are filled with his love and have power to overcome the world.

Another reason we should not love the world is in verse 16: “For everything in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--comes not from the Father but from the world.” John summarized the contents of the world as three things: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life. It is a most insightful summary of the world. “Lust” is a compulsion to have what belongs to someone else or to engage in activity which is morally wrong. “Flesh” means base human desires, which are in conflict with spiritual desires related to God. Flesh desires draw people away from God and drive them to gratify their sensual appetites. “Lust of the flesh.” This is a serious problem for human beings. Though created in the image of God to be very good, sin depraved human beings to the very core. Genesis 6:5b says, “...every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” So many of the evil deeds that happen on the earth are driven by lustful desires. Consider the pornography industry, sex trafficking, and the wicked tragedy of Jeffrey Epstein. Lustful desires always lead to ruin and destruction. How can we avoid this? Apostle Paul said, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16).

“Lust of the eyes.” Eyes are a gift from God which enable us to see God’s beautiful creation, great works of art, and our beloved family members and friends. This leads us to praise and worship God for his glorious works. But when lust causes us to misuse our eyes, they become avenues that lead to covetousness and idol worship. Through our eyes we can gratify lustful desires vicariously. With the coming of modern technology, the possibility to sin with our eyes has become a constant danger. Jesus’ warning applies to us now more than ever: “If your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away” (Mt 18:9). Jesus emphasized the seriousness of sinning through our eyes. In order to do this, he spoke in hyperbole, not literally. So don’t pluck out your eye but be careful about what you see.

“The pride of life.” Pride refers to arrogance and haughtiness. This is the root of sin. It is self-glory seeking. In order to exalt themselves, people boast about who they are, what they have, and what they do. They like to say, “Don’t you know who I am?!” They brag about their wealth, rank, dress, success, education, and career. Their conversations start with “I,” end with “me,” and have “my” in between. But Christians should be different. We boast about God

and what he has done. In Jeremiah 9:23-24 God advises us: “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth....” Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord (1Co 1:31). The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life come not from the Father, but from the world. So we should not be deceived by them. We should know: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights” (Ja 1:17).

The final reason we should not love the world is given in verse 17: “The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.” The world and the things in it are temporary and “are passing away” (ESV, NASB, NKJV). As many scientists attest, the world is hastening to its end ever so quickly. We also age day by day and are approaching death. Nothing in the world can be trusted. There was a historic meeting in Chicago in 1923. In attendance were presidents of the largest steel, utility and gas companies, the New York Stock Exchange, and most prominent bankers and speculators. They were celebrating their success and planning their future endeavors. However, 25 years later, a New York Times investigation revealed that all of them had met a horrible end, including bankruptcy, imprisonment, and suicide. In view of this, Forbes magazine offered the following lessons to be learned: *“Those who are on top now are not certain to finish in that position and are not guaranteed everlasting success or happiness. Be careful whom you choose to idolize.”*<sup>1</sup> The Bible says, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever” (1Pe 2:24-25).

On the other hand, there are so many people who served the Lord, doing his will throughout their lifetimes. They were never recognized or really appreciated. They quietly served others behind the scenes in order to follow Jesus’ footsteps. Recently, I officiated the homecoming ceremony of M. Monica Cho. I was surprised at the number of people who were thankful for her sacrificial service and faithful prayers. For example, when Danny Choi was

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshuabrown/2012/07/25/the-nine-financiers-a-parable-about-power/#344cc1263126>

seriously ill, she prayed, "Lord, take my life instead of his." Remarkably Danny was healed and established a beautiful family. Like her, so many people have done the will of God and gone to the Lord in eternal glory.

People are so attached to the world, believing that the world will give them success and happiness. However, the world fails to deliver what it promises. Rather, the world deceives us and leads us to destruction. So we should humbly listen to God's word: "Do not love the world, or anything in the world." Instead, we should love God with all our hearts, strength and souls and do his will. Loving God is the secret to happiness and victory.

Second, remain in him (18-27). Though the world and its desires are passing away, the world still has a powerful attraction through false teachings and lies. As Christians in this world, we need to discern the truth from lies and hold onto the truth. In verses 18-23 John gives us practical help in discerning truth from lies. In verses 24-27 he exhorts us to remain in Jesus.

Verse 18 says, "Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour." The last hour began with the first coming of Jesus and will last until he comes again (Heb 1:2). We are living in the last minutes of the last hour. Characteristic of the last hour is that many antichrists have come. This coincides with Jesus' teaching that at the end of the age many false messiahs would arise (Mk 13:5). They infiltrate the church, pretending to be Christians, and then spread false teachings to lead others astray. For a while they may be influential. But in the course of time they show their true colors as antichrists. As oil and water cannot mix, so Christians and antichrists cannot mix.

In verse 19, the word "belong" appears three times. It is translated from a Greek word which means "to be." It can be understood as "being the possession of someone and sharing certain traits." In essence it refers to those who are born again and bear some traits of Christ. "They did not really belong to us" means that they did not really belong to Jesus as those born again, even though they participated in the activities of the Christian fellowship. They were like Judas Iscariot who spent over three years with Jesus but never

confessed him as Christ and Lord. Eventually they went out of the Christian fellowship. But they did not say, "We are fake Christians." Rather they said, "We are the true Christians--you should listen to us." This confused many genuine believers. John revealed the true nature of antichrists to help genuine believers see spiritual reality clearly. As a young man, Joshua Harris advocated a Biblical view of marriage and discouraged young Christians from dating. He wrote a book titled, "I Kissed Dating Goodbye." Later he became the pastor of a megachurch. But last year he divorced his wife and renounced Christian faith. This is the evidence that he never really belonged to Christ. John urges us to see such people clearly.

How can we discern genuine believers from antichrists? Verse 20 says, "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth." The Holy One refers to Jesus Christ who sent the Holy Spirit to anoint believers. When we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit works to give us new birth and dwells within us. The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of Truth," and he leads believers into all truth (Jn 16:13). The Holy Spirit himself helps believers discern truth from lies and convinces us of the truth. The truth he reveals is trustworthy; no lie comes from the truth (21).

In verse 22, John gives a simple and clear way to discern the lies of the antichrist. Whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ, is a liar. In fact, such a person is the antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also (23). This tells us that the Father and the Son are one. Without knowing the Son, no one knows the Father. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). Those who deny Jesus' deity are an antichrist. Last week, CNN news anchor Don Lemon spoke about Jesus as "admittedly not perfect." In spite of his Catholic education and Baptist background, Mr. Lemon became an antichrist. Those who deny Jesus' humanity are also an antichrist. In truth Jesus is the incarnate God. Those who believe in and confess Jesus as the incarnate God are genuine Christians.

Now, in verses 24-27, John exhorts us in two ways that will keep us from going astray. First, he said, "...see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you" (24a). "What you have heard from the beginning"

is the gospel--the apostolic teaching. It is not a man-made story, but a God-made history which was long prepared and faithfully carried out to accomplish the salvation of mankind. It has not changed and will not change. Contexts, languages, and methods change, but the gospel message never changes. The gospel is not what we do for God, but what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. "...see that [it]...remains in you" indicates that this does not happen automatically. We need to take steps to ensure that it remains. We need to resist the lies of antichrists which often come in the form of trendy new teachings. We need to hold on to the facts of the gospel and their meaning applied to us. The gospel is so deep that we can grow endlessly in understanding and living it out. If the gospel remains in us, we will also remain in the Son and in the Father (24b). When we do so, we will enjoy what God has promised--eternal life (25). Eternal life is not simply living forever; it is the most joyful fellowship with God lasting for eternity. In verse 26, once again John warns them about those who were trying to lead them astray. John did not underestimate the power of Satan and his agents to deceive the believers. Then and now, the threat is real. We need to resist evil in order to remain in the gospel as of first importance.

John's second exhortation is in verse 27. "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him." The "anointing" refers to the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence. In addition, they had the essential truths of Christian faith that false teachers were denying. So they did not need anyone else to teach them these things again. The Holy Spirit confirmed the truth in them. He also teaches them all they need to know about the true nature of Christ. His anointing is real, unlike the counterfeit of the antichrist. So we can trust him fully. He will indeed lead us to know Jesus truly and personally. By his help, we should remain in Jesus. Let us take to heart God's word, "Do not love the world or anything in the world." Let us hold onto the gospel, depend on the Holy Spirit and remain in Jesus.