



MARCH 10, 1985

Do Not Love the World

Resource by [John Piper](#) Scripture: [1 John 2:15-17](#) Topic: [Killing Sin](#)

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for 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 of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The text begins with a command — it’s the only command in the text and therefore probably the main point. Verse 15a: “Do not love the world or the things in the world.” Everything else in the text is an argument, or incentive, for why we should not love the world.

Love for the World Pushes Out Love for the Father

The first incentive John gives is that “if anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him” (verse 15b). In other words, the reason you shouldn’t love the world is that you can’t love the world and God at the same time. Love for the world pushes out love for God, and love for God pushes out love for the world.

As Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” ([Matthew 6:24](#)). So don’t love the world, because that would put you in the class with the God-haters whether you think you are or not. “If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him.” That’s the first reason John gives not to love the world.

Then in verse 16 comes the support and explanation of that first argument. The reason love for the world pushes out love for God is that “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.” Leave out those three phrases in the middle of verse 16 and it would read like this: the reason love for the world excludes love for God is that all that is in the world is not of God. In other words, it’s just empty talk to say that you love God if you love what is not of God.

John could have rested his case at the end of verse 16. Don’t love the world because love for the world can’t coexist with love for God. But he doesn’t rest his case here. He adds two more arguments — two more incentives not to love the world.

The World and Its Lusts Will Pass

First, in verse 17a he says, “And the world passes away, and the lust of it.” Nobody buys stock in a company that is sure to go bankrupt. Nobody sets up house in a sinking ship. No reasonable person would lay up treasure where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal, would they? The world is passing away! To set your heart on it is only asking for heartache and misery in the end.

That’s not all: Not only is the world passing away, but also the lusts of it. If you share the desires of the world, you will pass away. You will not only lose your treasure. You will lose your life. If you love the world, it will pass away and take you with it. “The world passes away and the lust of it.”

If You Do the Will of the Father, You Will Live Forever

Second, in verse 17b John says, “But he who does the will of God abides forever.” The opposite of loving the world is not only loving the Father (verse 15), but also doing the will of the Father (verse 17). And that connection is not hard to understand. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” ([John 14:15](#)). John said in [1 John 5:3](#), “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” So loving the Father in verse 15 and doing the will of God in verse 17 are not really separate things.

If you love God, you will love what he wills. It is empty talk to say I love God but I don’t love what God loves. So John is saying in verse 17, “If you love the world, you will perish with the world, but if you don’t love the world but love God, you will do his will and live with him forever.”

In summary, then, the text contains one commandment and three arguments, or incentives. The commandment is, “Don’t love the world or the things in the world.” The first incentive is that if you love the world, you don’t love God. The second incentive is that if you love the world, you will perish with the world. And the third incentive is that if you love God instead of the world, you will live with God forever.

Saving Faith and Love for God

Let’s meditate for a few moments on these final two incentives and especially how they relate to saving faith.

We have been well taught that we are saved by *faith*! “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved!” ([Acts 16:31](#)). But we have not been as well taught what saving faith is. For example, how often do we discuss the relationship between trusting Christ and loving Christ? Can you trust him savingly and not love him? Evidently, John doesn’t think so, because the issue in this text is whether you love God or love the world, and the result is whether you die with the world or have eternal life with God. But John knows that eternal life comes through faith.

John says in 5:13, “I write this to you who *believe* in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” So eternal life does depend on believing in the Christ. But what is this “believing”? If we are courteous, and let John speak for himself, his letter fills out what he means. When he says that not loving the world but loving God so much that we do his will is what leads to eternal life, we learn that saving faith and love for God are inseparable. Both are the path to eternal life because they are the same path.

In [John 5:42–44](#) Jesus confronts the Jewish leaders who do not believe on him with these words: “I know that you have not the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name and you do not receive me. . . . How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” In other words, the reason they do not receive or believe on Jesus is that they do not love God. They love the world — the glory of men — not the glory of God. So Jesus taught his apostles that, where there is no love for God, there can be no saving faith (see [John 3:18–19](#)).

One Way of Salvation

That’s why John, when he comes to write his letter, can take “love for God” and “trust in Christ” and treat them as one way of salvation. Look how he does so in 5:3–4: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” In other words, it is our love for God that overcomes the obstacles of disobedience and makes the commandments of God a joy rather than a burden. “Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her” ([Genesis 29:20](#)). Love for God makes his service a joy and overcomes the forces of disobedience.

But then look at verse 4. Here he says the same thing but speaks of faith instead of love. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.” It is *faith* that overcomes the world — it is *faith* that conquers disobedience and renders the commandments of God a joy rather than a burden.

What shall we say, then, concerning love for God and faith in Christ? The path of victory that overcomes the world and leads to eternal life is the one path of faith toward Christ and love for God. Saving faith is part of love for God and love for God is part of saving faith. There are not two ways to heaven. There is one narrow way — the way of faith which loves God and the way of love which trusts God.

Paul and James Agree

That is why not only John but also Paul and James hold out the promises of life only to those who love God:

All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.
([Romans 8:28](#))

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived . . . God has prepared for those who love him. ([1 Corinthians 2:9](#))

If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed!” ([1 Corinthians 16:22](#))

Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? ([James 2:5](#); see also [2 Timothy 4:8](#); [James 1:12](#))

So you can see what John is trying to do for us in verse 17 of our text. He is trying to show us that loving the Father and freeing ourselves from the love of the world is not optional. It is not icing on the cake of saving faith. It is a matter of eternal life and eternal death. It is number one on life’s agenda. Nothing in all the world is more important than experiencing love for God in your heart. This love is the first and great

commandment, Jesus said. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” ([Matthew 22:36–40](#)).

Two Possibilities If You Don't Feel Much Love for God

Perhaps even as I preach, some of you are saying, “I don't feel very much love for God right now.” There are two possible reasons for that.

1. You Are Not Born Again

One is the possibility that you are not born again. It is possible that you are a cultural Christian or a hereditary Christian. You may have developed patterns of religious talk and behavior because it is socially advantageous or because your parents or peers talked and acted this way. But you may never have experienced a deep change in your nature by the power of the Holy Spirit which gave birth to a stream of new love for God.

Henry Martyn, the brilliant missionary and translator of the last century, looked at his conversion four years afterward and said, “The work is real. I can no more doubt it than I can my own existence. The whole current of my desires is altered, I am walking quite another way, though I am incessantly stumbling in that way.”

So it could be that this conversion has never happened to you and that your religion is all outward form and not an inner experience of love for God. Paul said in [2 Timothy 3:1–5](#),

In the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it.

In other words, we may expect that there will be numerous religious church-goers who know nothing of the new birth and genuine heartfelt love for God.

If you are among that number, you should direct your heart to Christ and seek him earnestly in his word. Peter said that we are born again through the living and abiding word of God ([1 Peter 1:23](#)). So if you want to be born again, you should pour over the word of God. You should cry to Christ that he open your eyes to know the Father ([Matthew 11:27](#)). You should plead with God to take out your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh that you might love God with all your heart and all your soul ([Deuteronomy 30:6](#)).

You should forsake all known sins and give yourself to all the means of grace until the light dawns in your heart and Christ shines so bright in his power and love that he is irresistibly attractive and you fall in worship and love before him. And do not quit the pursuit until you have been born into new life. “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” ([Jeremiah 29:13](#)).

2. Your Love Has Grown Cool and Weak

The other possibility is that you have indeed been born again, but your love for God has simply grown cool and weak. You've tasted what it means to have a heart for God. You can recall how once you felt that to know him was better than anything the world could offer. But this morning the wick is smoldering and the reed is bruised.

The prescription for your ailment is not much different than the prescription for seeking new birth in the first place. The same Spirit that begets life also nourishes life. The same word that ignites the fire of love also rekindles love. The same Christ who once brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light ([1 Peter 2:9](#)) can take away the long dark night of your soul. So yield yourself to the Holy Spirit. Immerse yourself in the word of God. Cry out to Christ for a new vision of the glory of his grace. Don't be content with lukewarmness. Pursue a new passion for Christ.

And whichever of these groups you are in — or if you are here full of love to God this morning — let the remaining admonitions of this text stir you up to count everything as rubbish compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ ([Philippians 3:8](#)).

Love for God and Love for the World Cannot Coexist

According to [1 John 2:15](#), if your love for God is cool this morning, it's because love for the world has begun to take over your heart and choke your love for God. The love of the world and the love of the Father cannot coexist. And every heart loves something. The very essence of our nature is desire. There is nobody in this room who doesn't want something. At the center of our heart is a spring of longing. But that's an awkward image, isn't it?

A longing is a craving, a desire, a want, a need. But these aren't very well described as a spring. A spring of needs is a contradiction in terms. Springs bubble up; needs suck in. A longing is more like a drain — or a vacuum. At the center of our heart is a sucking drain — like at the bottom of a swimming pool. We are endlessly thirsty. But we can't suck water and air at the same time.

If you try to satisfy your longing by sucking in the air of the world, you will not be able to drink the water of heaven. And eventually, your motor will burn up because you were made to pump the water of God, not the air of the world.

The 'World' We Are Not to Love

But now what is this "world" that we are not to love? Verse 16 says it is characterized by three things: "lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." The word for "life" does not refer to the state of being alive but rather to the things in the world that make life possible. For example, in [3:17](#) it is translated "goods." "Anyone who has this world's *goods* and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" Jesus uses the word in [Mark 12:44](#) when he says that the poor widow in the temple "put in everything that she had, her whole *living*."

So the phrase "pride of life" means pride in what you possess — the things you have. Now we can see how the three descriptions of the world relate to each other. The first two — lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes

— refer to desires for what we don't have. And the third — the pride of life — refers to the pride in what we do have. The world is driven by these two things: passion for pleasure and pride in possessions.

And the passion for pleasure is described in two ways because there are two large classes of pleasure — physical and aesthetic. There is the lust of the flesh — bodily pleasures; and the lust of the eyes — aesthetic and intellectual pleasures. John is not naïve. He knows that the world is not limited to Hennepin Avenue.

There is the lust of the gutter and the lust of the gourmet. There is the lust for hard rock and the lust for high Rachmaninoff. There is the lust of Penthouse and the lust of Picasso. There is the lust of the Orpheum and the lust of the Ordway. First John ends with this ringing command: “Little children, *keep yourselves from idols!*” — whether they are crude or whether they are cultured ([1 John 5:21](#)).

Anything in this world that is not God can rob your heart of the love of God. Anything that is not God can draw your heart away from God. If you don't have it, it can fill you with a passion to get it. If you get it, it can fill you with pride that you've got it.

But against the pride of life the apostle says, “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as though it were not a gift. . . . Let him who boasts boast in the Lord” ([1 Corinthians 4:7](#); [1:31](#)). So let there be no boasting in possessions. They are all gods.

And against the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes the psalmist says, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you” ([Psalm 73:25](#)). Therefore, let us desire nothing but God, possess nothing but God, pursue nothing but God.

What Do We Do with Our Desires?

But someone will ask, “Should I not desire dinner? Should I not desire a job? Should I not desire a spouse? Should I not desire the child in my womb? Should I not desire a healthy body or a good night's rest or the morning sun or a great book or an evening with friends?”

And the answer is no — unless it is a desire for *God*! Do you desire dinner because you desire God? Do you want a job because in it you will discover God and love God? Do you long for a spouse because you are hungry for God and hope to see him and love him in your partner? Do you desire the child and the healthy body and the good night's rest and the morning sun and the great book and the evening with friends for God's sake? Do you have an eye for God in everything you desire? (See [Colossians 3:17](#); [1 Corinthians 10:31](#).)

Saint Augustine captured the heart of our text when he prayed to the Father and said, “He loves thee too little who loves anything together with thee which he loves not for thy sake.”

Therefore, brothers and sisters, 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. But if the love of the Father is in you, if you love God with all your heart, then every room you enter will be a temple of love to God, all your work will be a sacrifice of love to God, every meal will be a banquet of love with God, every song will be an overture of love to God.

And if there is any desire of the flesh or any desire of the eyes that is not also a desire for God, then we will put it out of our lives, so that we can say with John and with the psalmist,

Whom have I in heaven but you,
and on earth there is nothing that I desire besides you.