

1 John 2:15-17 (ESV)

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.

What does it mean to be a “worldly” person? It depends on the context. There’s the culture, and there’s the church. For example, culturally speaking, a worldly person is one that’s been around the block a few times. They’d see themselves as:

Cosmopolitan as opposed to Provincial

Sophisticated Ordinary

Refined (urbane) Common (unassuming)

The first church I served in after seminary was a little un-incorporated village of Hingham Wisconsin. The church was full of Dutch dairy farmers; good salt of the earth folks.

Most the people there had never lived outside of Sheboygan country, so they were a little suspicious of outsiders. The first time I walked down to the post office someone said to me, “Hello Dominee” (which is Dutch for pastor). I thought he had said, “hello dummy!”

Everybody knew one another. One time someone who I did not recognize was walking through the village and I asked my friend Larry who that was.

He said, “oh, that’s one of the Ten Haken kids. He went off to college and then got a job in New York. He’s really worldly.”

A worldly person in that sense is one who is well cultured, well-educated and quite comfortable in high society. Very different from a small Midwestern provincial village.

In theological language, the word “worldly” takes on a different connotation.

It speaks of one who may profess to be a believer, but they easily fit in with the unbelieving culture. They appear to not only be in the world, but of it as well.

They know the nomenclature of the world. They are attuned with what is trendy, what is popular, savvy. They know what is acceptable and what is considered inappropriate in pop-culture.

For example, it's okay to be spiritual, but don't wear your religion on your sleeve.

It's okay to have your beliefs and convictions, but keep them to yourself if they go against the spirit of the age. It's okay to be a Christian, as long as it doesn't interfere with your lifestyle.

Instead of identifying with a Christian sub-culture, worldly believers have chosen to go mainstream. They look, act, and talk the way the predominate culture does. They are worldly.

Historically, evangelicals have tried to separate themselves from the culture in lifestyle, mannerisms, and behavior.

Unfortunately our message often came across as an awkward attempt to distinguish ourselves from the world. (don't drink, smoke or chew, or go out with girls who do)

Some Christian sects like the Amish and tried to separate themselves from the world altogether. They don't want to identify with any of the trappings that come with modernity and pop culture.

So they have formed an **alternative culture**. The Amish drew a line in the sand of time and said:

We're not going to let technology change our values and make us worldly. We will separate ourselves from the culture and form our own communities. We may not be able to change the world, but we're not going to allow the world to change us.

To a lesser degree, that is what home schooling families are trying to do. Separate your children from the worldliness that is so rampant and pervasive in today's day and age. Protect our children from the world, at least while they are young.

Today many mainstream evangelicals have tried to create a **parallel universe** by pretty much adopting worldly practices but with Christian vocabulary and images.

Christian music, Christian entertainment, Christian celebrities and even “Christian” dating services. The message seems to be, “anything the world can do, we can do better.”

But what does it mean to be “worldly” in a Biblical context? Is it allowing external influences into our lives, or is it more internal and spiritual in nature? That’s what we’re dealing with today.

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And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

The title of our message today is THE ETERNAL LOVE OF GOD IN THE GOSPEL.

We’ll contrast God’s eternal love for the world with man’s temporal love for the world and the things in it. Then in the Gospel we’ll see the redemption of the world through the saving work of JESUS Christ on the cross.

This is today’s message in a nutshell: **The things of this world are meant to lead us to worship the God who made all things good for His glory. Yet it is in Christ alone that our affections can be redirected and redeemed.**

We begin with the truth that needs to be reaffirmed often, that God so loved the world. That of course is the first part of the most well-known verse in the New Testament, from John’s Gospel. (3:16)

There are a lot of bad things going on in the world today, but that hasn’t changed God’s love for His creation and all that’s in it.

Genesis 1:31 (ESV)

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

1 Timothy 4:4 (ESV)

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,

God delights in His creation for it testifies to His wonder and majestic beauty. He is the ultimate artist. He is the supreme architect. He is the master composer.

Sin has marred the beauty of God's creation, but it has not diminished its value in the sight of God. In the days of Noah God was sorry that he had made man, and so the flood came. But God's love for the world did not change.

In our text it says that we are not to love the world. The word cosmos here refers not to the created world, but the present evil age that's prevalent in the world.

The created cosmos is meant to draw the crown of his creation into praise and adoration.

Those of you who love the outdoors understand this as well as anyone. How can you not praise the maker of heaven and earth when you see the splendor of his creation?

The Fall colors are just beginning to show and we've had a magnificent run of beautiful weather. (this is why we live in Michigan)

Yet it is always been puzzling to me that people can be so oblivious to the Creator even as they enjoy the beauty of God's creation. The apostle Paul says that man has no excuse for unbelief.

Romans 1:18-23 (ESV)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

That takes us to our second point. God loves the world. So does man, but man's love is corrupted by our sinful nature. Instead of worshipping the Creator of the world, we worship the things of the world.

1 John 2:15 (ESV)

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.

The chief sin of mankind is idolatry. We take something that is good, and we make an idol of it. An idol replaces God as the primary focus of our affection and adoration.

It could be anything. John breaks down our sinful tendencies into three categories.

The desires of the flesh

The lusts of the eyes

The pride of life

The **desires of the flesh** are normal appetites and longings which can dominate and control your thoughts, actions, and behavior. It's a desire that has turned into a craving. It controls you, you don't control it.

Hunger can turn into gluttony. Thirst can lead to drunkenness. Excessive sleep can turn into sloth. The want of comfort can lead to disproportionate yearning for luxury and indulgence.

The **lust of the eyes** can turn normal attractions into sinful longings. Your affections are drawn to that which you believe will satisfy the desires of your heart.

It is said that the eyes are the windows to the heart. The eyes allow us to visualize what we really want and think we must have or we will surely die.

David lusted after Bathsheba. Samson craved after Delilah. Potipher's wife desired Joseph.

Lust is the total opposite of love. Love desires to give, lust desires to get. Lust is the counterfeit to love.

It is sensual and always selfish. It is deceiving and will always lead you away from true intimacy and affection.

While the lusts of the eyes deals with that which you don't have, **the pride of life** deals with the stuff that you do have.

The pride of life is the breeding ground for any kind of extravagance. Wealth is a blessing, but it can turn into a curse.

If you think that your possessions determine your value, you have fallen prey to the pride of life.

If you crave the praise of men more than the praise of God, then the pride of life has you in its grips.

If you think that your gifts and abilities are what gives you significance, then you have believed the lie of the evil one.

If you find that you are always wanting more of what you already have enough of, it's the pride of life that's the problem.

The desires of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, the pride of life. They correspond to the three nemesis of your soul; **the world, the flesh and the devil.**

How can we love and appreciate the world and the things of the world the way we ought to?

1 John 2:17 (ESV)

And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Our affections, our desires, our longings need to be redeemed. We need to view life from an eternal perspective. Our passions must be redirected.

That is so much more than just changing your attitude. That is far deeper than just having a different outlook on life. Redemption is so much more than just making better choices or adding enhancements to your life.

The Gospel is good news because it announces something that's already been done. What JESUS did on the cross was the redemption of our souls.

The soul is the seat of your affections. It gravitates toward that which will give you the greatest satisfaction.

When you have been redeemed, you no longer belong to this world only. You don't expect the things of this world to bring you ultimate satisfaction.

You learn that there are richer and greater blessings that come from the One from whom all blessings flow.

Instead of expecting your spouse, or your career, or your possessions to meet your deepest needs, you turn to Christ. He alone can set you free from worldliness.

Instead of relying on the temporal passions that war against your soul, you seek to satisfy a deeper thirst and deeper hunger.

It's the difference between living on junk food that can't sustain you for long, and learning how to eat from a banquet table of the LORD.

Next Sunday we'll celebrate the LORD'S Supper. It is like a banquet table that believers are invited to come to and feast. In preparation for that supper, we're told to examine our hearts.

"Search me O God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there be some wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Are there some things in your life that you love more than the giver of every good gift? Are there affections in your heart that are prone to wander and leave the God you love?

If you love the things of this world more than God, it's because you don't know the God who redeemed sinners to Himself.

I can give you all kinds of exhortations and guilt producing appeals to change your heart, but they won't do much lasting good.

Your heart changes only when you are awed by the beauty and splendor of something far more captivating. That is found in the person and work of JESUS Christ.

He captures your imagination. He awakens your senses. He enlivens your heart so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

The Gospel doesn't lessen your capacity to love the world, it deepens it. The world says that life is good when things go your way. The Gospel says that life is good when you know that you are in God's hand.

Do you know that this morning? Have the things that used to charm you in this world, left you empty?

There are some things in life that you will never grow tired of. The beauty of a sunset. The turning of the autumn leaves. The joy of holding a sleeping infant. The smile of someone you love.

At such moments, you understand that life isn't about the accumulation of things or the accolades of those who think you're so great.

Life is about knowing the source of all true love, and sharing that love in worship and service for His glory.

You won't find that in the things of this world that are passing away. You will find it in Christ alone.