

THE LOVE OF THE WORLD AND THE PRIDE OF LIFE

“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; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” I Jn 2:15-17.

PHRASES USED IN THIS PASSAGE

The World

In this passage, the “world” refers to the sum total of things that go to make up the world order—its politics [pertaining to governing bodies—governments, ecclesiastical hierarchies, committees, organizations etc], its economics [the world of finance—of acquiring and selling of goods and services, of acquiring possessions], and its social order [social elements of living that constitute our way of life].

The Things in the World

The ‘things in the world’ are the things through which the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are enticed to operate. They are things like money, goods, entertainments, recreations, wealth, earthly pleasures, food, sport—the things of the world that have the power to stir desire, seduce, enslave and captivate. They are a stumbling block to our surrendering our hearts to God, and receiving spiritual knowledge and salvation.

The Love Of The World

The Greek word ‘*agapao*,’ used for ‘love’ in “love of the world,” is

- 1) used of persons: to welcome, to entertain, to be fond of, to love dearly, and
- 2) used of things: to be well pleased, to be contented at or with a thing

John’s burden for those who love the world is that it is used by Satan to bring people into bondage, resulting in things of the world taking precedence over the things of God—over attending fellowship, over ministries, and over personal growth in Christ.

He warns in I Jn 5:19, that the whole world system is under Satan’s control. **“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.”** It is his main avenue for bringing people into bondage. Knowing this, he said of himself, **“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”** 1 Cor 6:12.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus warns that the cares of the world ensnare us, and the word of the kingdom is choked and becomes dead in a person’s heart. The end result is that he becomes an unfruitful servant of Christ. **“Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.”** Matt 13:22.

A concrete example of the spirit of the world overcoming a Christian brother is provided for us by Paul’s account of the departure of Demas from his ministry. **“for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica-- Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.”** 2 Tim 4:10.

The Love Of The Father

The word “love” used here, is different to that used for love of the world. This is the Greek word ‘*agape*,’ the word used for the love of God and Jesus Christ for us. It should be appropriated by the brethren through Christ’s life within them. It is the *agape* love manifested in the brethren that makes the church distinct from the world. Those who love the things of the world do not have the love of the Father in them. They do not love the Father, nor have they got Christ’s or the Father’s love for the brethren in them.

Is not in Him

It is a startling reality that if someone loves the world or the things of the world, the love of the Father, that is, the ‘*agape*’ love which distinguishes Christian brethren, IS NOT IN HIM. It is possible to be a Christian, and be a member of the body of Christ, and be devoid of Christian love.

Further, John wrote, “**In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest** [or be plainly recognized]: **Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love** [*‘agaoa’*—to love in a social or moral sense] **his brother.**” 1 Jn 3:10.

John was writing to Christians when he said that he who does not love his brother, even in a natural social or moral sense, is not of [proceeding out of] God. The conversion of a Christian, accompanied by regeneration of his spirit, should result in at least a natural love of his Christian brothers. This changes to ‘*agape*’ love when we appropriate the life and love of Christ. It is sobering to realize that if a Christian does not have a natural love of his brothers, he is not of God. We may conclude that either his conduct is not of God, or even worse, his conversion is not real.

It is just as sobering to realize that if we love the world or the things of the world, to the degree that we are captivated and controlled by them, it is not possible for us to know the reality of Christ’s love for the our brothers in Christ.

The Lust Of The Flesh

Lust is an enslaving desire or longing to satisfy the demands or appetites of the carnal body and fleshly nature. In sexuality it leads to sensuous lust of the eyes and imagination, fornication and adultery.

Even food, which is essential to life, has the power to bring us into bondage. Paul warned us that this is not to be taken lightly. “**For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame-- who set their mind on earthly things.**” Phil 3:18-19.

The lust of the flesh, or carnal nature, leads us into bondage of things of the world, such as the desire for money and worldly goods and possessions, and bondage to recreations and entertainments.

The Lust Of The Eyes

This is the looking at things or other people with idolatry, covetousness, or sensuality; again inciting desires to fulfill the demands of the flesh.

In Hebrews we are warned about looking at the material possessions of others with covetousness: “**Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."** Heb 13:5.

Jesus warned about men looking at women with lust in their hearts. “**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.” Matt 5:28-29. Are we meant to take the instruction to pluck out your right eye literally? Why the right eye? If it is to be taken spiritually, or figuratively, what does it mean?

It should be quite obvious that this direction from the Lord to pluck out an eye is not to be taken literally.

Firstly Jesus uses the starkness of this analogy to illustrate the seriousness of the lust of the eyes.

Secondly, there is a significance attached to His use of “**your right eye.**” In the bible, “right” symbolizes strength, as in the right hand of God: “**Your right hand, O LORD, has become glorious in power; your right hand, O LORD, has dashed the enemy in pieces.**” Exod 15:6.

But this attribute of strength should not to be associated with the eyes, as if one eye is stronger than the other. Strength in this case concerns lust of the eyes that are motivated by the things of the world. If, for instance, there is a strong lust of covetousness, it should be “**plucked out.**”

Plucking out, or entirely eliminating the offending lust is not achieved by the use of our will power in an effort to avoid it. That would be using the flesh trying to overcome the flesh, and that always results in frustration and failure. It must be “put off,” or placed on the altar of the cross, and be replaced by “putting on” Jesus Christ and His victory over the world. Paul instructed, “**put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.**” Eph 4:22-24. This process is explained more fully later in this study.

The Pride Of Life

Life in this reading means all that pertains to one’s way of living, including all that sustains that manner of life.

The pride of life is an empty presumptuous assurance that trusts in one’s own ability to gather wealth, possessions, and satisfy life’s demands. It trusts in its own power and resources and the resources of the world, and despises dependence on God.

THE ESSENCE OF THE READING

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are out workings of the carnal flesh that are enticed into operation by the things of the world, which “**lies under the sway of the wicked one.**” The world order is one arm of the kingdom of Antichrist.

John gives us a clear warning. “**If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**” Those who love the things of the world do not love the Father, nor have they got Christ’s or the Father’s love for the brethren in them.

Just as the Spirit and the flesh are opposed to each other and war against each other, the love of the world is likewise opposed to the love of the Father. A Christian must make up his mind which he will give allegiance to—God or the world. The apostle James bluntly sets the alternatives before us. “**Adulterers and adulteresses [those who have committed adultery with the world]! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**” James 4:4.

HOW WE SHOULD CONDUCT OURSELVES IN THE WORLD

Overcoming Individual Aspects of the World’s Control

The love of the world and the things of the world, is born out of carnal desire. There is only one way to overcome fleshly desires, and that is by the Spirit. We must claim our union with Christ in His death, and our resurrection with Him in newness of life—to live our new lives by the power of His indwelling life in us. Paul outlines the nature of such a Spiritual walk in union with Christ.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Gal 2:20. (KJV).

Again we are looking at spiritual realities. Jesus became mankind on the cross, so we (spiritually) are incorporated in His crucifixion. Our old man, or carnal nature [from a spiritual point of view] was crucified in Him. When we desire with all our hearts to have our carnal nature crucified with Christ, and testify to it having happened on the cross, the Holy Spirit makes it a reality. In this case we have decided to declare the power of the cross on our love of the world. Paul makes this testimony:

“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Gal 6:14.

When the destructive power of the world has been revealed to us, and we have decided to break its control over us, we must make a similar testimony. The Holy Spirit may have revealed to us that a particular facet of the world is having an enslaving influence on us—say watching TV [watching TV, like many of the world’s activities, is all right in itself, but has the potential to exert a control over us]. Your testimony may be something like: “I choose to put the love of TV on the altar of the cross, declaring that in Jesus Christ I was crucified to the world and all of its power.” This will break the power of the spirits of the world that Satan uses to enslave us, and in this case the enslaving nature of TV will diminish, and go completely as we stand on our testimony. This is a spiritual walk in which we are putting to death the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit. [Rom 8:13].

“And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” Gal 5:24-25.

Overcoming the World Generally in our Daily Walk

To overcome the power of the world generally in our daily walk, we must put off our carnal nature daily, declaring it crucified in Jesus Christ, and clothe ourselves with the life of Jesus, allowing Him to reign in us. In this case our victory over the world is by appropriating Christ’s victory over the world. Jesus declared, **“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”** John 16:33. The apostle John emphasized this when he wrote, **“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”** I Jn 4:4-6.

The last aspect of overcoming the world, is to avoid contact with Christian brothers who have given themselves over to the enslaving power of the world.

“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone NAMED A BROTHER, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner-- not even to eat with such a person.” 1 Cor 5:9-11.

FINAL WARNING

“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.” 2 Pet 2:20.