

## Loving the World

Jonathan K. Dodson | 1 John 2:15-17 | April 3, 2022

This week I read another headline of a megachurch pastor's failure, was reminded of church leader's thirst for political power, and my own desire for attention. So much scandal, among Christian leaders. Pray for *us*. But it's not just Christian leaders. Christians are often not much different from non-Christians in financial generosity, sexual ethics, how they raise their kids, what they pursue. A recent survey reports that 86% of US adults believe "*To be fulfilled in life, you should pursue the things you desire most*" 72% Christians the same thing. If you don't want to become a statistic, if you want to live by what God desires, then consider the: *Pull of the World, the Perils of the World, and the Promise of Eternity*.

### **Pull of the World**

When John says, **Do not love the world or the things of the world**, it's not a suggestion; it's a command. The first of ten serious imperatives in 1 John. What does he mean? He could mean don't love the material world. That Christians shouldn't enjoy material goods like cars, clothes, homes. But Jesus says, *If you who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?* Matt 7:11. John isn't saying don't enjoy the things of the world; he's saying don't love

the things of the world. But he also says, Don't love *the world*. What does that mean? He's referring to *the present world order*. Not a political order but the spiritual system we're born into: ...and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (5:19). Satan's power and values permeate this world. Now that can sound absurd to modern people. We know devils are a fiction. But how do you account for racism, genocide, selfishness, *war*? The secular therapeutic answer is: people weren't loved enough. When Putin declared war on Ukraine, an IG personality recited a poem for Putin lamenting his mother didn't love him, his friends bullied him, and that if she could have just given him a hug, he wouldn't have started this war. *That* is absurd. Demagogues start wars because they lust for power and will do anything to preserve it *just like Satan*. So when people call war evil and unjust, they abandon the secular, therapeutic worldview to borrow firm, biblical categories of good and evil. Why is there evil in the world? Because it is ruled by the evil one. Now, how might *we* love the world? By dabbling in the occult, tarot cards, the demonic. That's a real issue from some. Scripture tells us to *resist* the devil and he will flee, not to embrace him. But most of us enter his world through *the back door*, by loving what the world loves: desires of the flesh, the eyes, and the pride of life. You need to know the evil one is content for you to slip into the back door, engage in affairs with these idols, *without you even*

*knowing he's the God behind the gods.* CSL: [Enemy-occupied territory](#)—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. When you go to church you are really listening-in to the secret wireless from our friends: [that is why the enemy is so anxious to prevent us from going.](#) He loves it when people don't go to church because they don't hear the truth about the rightful King, *and don't worship him.* Instead, they love the world and the things of the world. What's keeping you from worship? Side hustle, sleep, laziness, spiritual apathy? But we were made to run on worship, not on the world. To be *satisfied, strengthened, enamoured* with God. A number of years ago I chaperoned a school trip, responsible for three boys. When one of them learned I was a pastor, he said to me: That's fine, I just prefer to keep God on the side. Is that what you're doing: keeping God on the side, slipping into the world through the back door, not running on love of the Father? How do live a life with Christ not pushed to the side but central? How do we fight love of the world?

### **Perils of the World**

By avoiding three perils: [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.](#) (16). You want to follow the true

King? Run on worship? Fight these desires. **Desires of the flesh.**

Desires get a bad rap in some religious circles. We're often told to rid ourselves of desire, to just be a willing vessel for God. But Jesus uses desire positively when he says, [I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer](#) (Lk 22:15). Desires can

be good. What makes them bad? When they become desires *of the flesh*. Calvin says desires of the flesh "seek to live softly and delicately, intent only on our own advantages." *It's an inward focus.*

Do you tip toe around God's desires in order to live for your own desires? *I can't tithe generously; I need to save for the future, so you don't give. I really need to rest tonight, so you don't pursue CG, don't love one another. Man, I really need to sleep, so you don't get up early enough to pray, but watch Netflix every night.* Desires of the flesh lead to a *path of least resistance piety*. How can I follow Jesus without disadvantaging myself? But Christianity is all about renouncing ourselves: [Take up your cross daily and follow me](#). And when we do, we get more than could ever imagine. That's John's point at the end of our passage. But for now, Jesus knows love of the world is tempting. It's why this text is here, and it's why he *desired* to eat the Passover meal with disciples: who would betray him, *just like us*. His body broken for us. That's a God worth desiring, a king worth following. The second threat to the love of God is **desires of the eyes**. *Not inward but outward in focus.* It's being captivated by things

we see, a focus on *appearance*. Someone told me not too long ago that I have dark circles around my eyes, so I bought an anti-aging stick. As we age, we become even more concerned about losing our youth. But my wife and I often talk about *aging gracefully*. To not resist age with botox, surgeries, or obsession with our dilapidating bodies. To care for them but to age gracefully. Not obsess about appearance. We can also desire stuff: maybe that new tech or gear. You've researched it more than you've read the Bible recently. You know its pros and cons better than Jesus. You *desire* it. There's a commercial with Ewan McGregor as he walks through a set saying: *Stuff, we all love stuff, but I doubt any of us will look back on our lives and think I wish I would have gotten a thinner TV, better scent, then exits the studio and walks out to a beautiful beach asking, "Will we regret the things we didn't buy? Or the places we didn't go?" Wrong. What we will regret most is not things not purchased or places not visited but desires not directed toward God.* We will regret a lack of true worship. Of loving the world more than we loved the Father and the Son. Maybe you don't struggle with living inward, *desires of the flesh*, or outward, *desires of the eyes*. Maybe you live *downward, the pride of life*. **The pride of life** is overconfidence in our resources: intellect, artistry, wealth, accomplishments. I'm too smart to fall for the desires of the eyes and flesh. I see through all that because I'm more enlightened. *Your sins are noble*. You're a reader, a

philanthropist, a Christian. Your work improves lives: medicine, education, social work, ministry. Pride comes before the fall, *down*. But the worshipper looks up. Her eyes not on herself, her stuff, or her resources but on God. God in the center not on the side. Which do you need to fight for the love of God? The desires of the flesh (in), the eyes (out), or the pride of life (down)?

### **Promise of Eternity**

Why should we love God instead of loving the world? John gives us two reasons. A negative and a positive. **Negative:** *And the world is passing away along with its desires* (17). It's passing away, a losing endeavor, a really bad bet. Your youth, your stuff, your sleep, your life will all be taken away. Like the darkness passing away 2:8, *and the true light already shining*. When Jesus came into our world, he introduced a glitch into the system. Through his death and resurrection, he ruptured the rule of the evil one making it possible *to live in the world without loving the world*. He became a *sacrifice* for those who put God on the side, an *advocate* for those who look in, out, down. Jesus made it possible to escape the world order by hatching his kingdom inside the world and put the world on notice! It's passing away. Why shouldn't we love the world? In the words of Colin Kruse, "*There is no future in worldliness.*" The **positive** reason, *but whoever does the will of God abides forever*. Those who not only

desire God but do God's will live forever. You will not pass away like the things of this world. You'll receive a new resurrection body to inhabit a new creation. *There is a future in godliness.* I was talking with someone who lost their dad recently. And that when he thinks of eternity it's hard to imagine not getting bored, but then he remembers *Dad* will be there. He was onto something: eternal life is not merely life unending *but life in the unending presence God. Our Father will be there*, who loves us like no other. Until then, let's fight the desires of the flesh, the eyes, and the pride of life. Let's love God, not this world, who so *desired* us his body was broken *for us*.