

The World

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John mentioned the “evil one” (poneros) in I John 2:14. He proceeded at once to command Christians to not love the world. The world is an enemy to fellowship; therefore, John was inspired to give the command, “Do not love [me agapate, present active imperative of agapao, to love] the world...” (I John 2:15 NASB). The apostle gave the reason believers are not to love the world: “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies [present middle indicative of keima, to lie, lie under an influence, or be involved in] in the power of the evil one [en to ponero, in the sphere of the evil one]” (I John 5:19 NASB). He used the word poneros five times to speak of the evil one (2:13, 14; 3:12a; 5:18, 19) and one time when speaking of evil works (3:12b). Evil works are performed by the evil one that can do nothing but perform evil works. They go together like a horse and a carriage.

The forbidden world is not the world that God made, which is the world as a habitable land, the world of relations (duties regarding life, family, and business), or the world as a sphere. The forbidden world is its atmosphere—its evil society, morals, principles, and system that is hostile to God. It is the arrangement of the world that is lying in the power of the evil one, or that world that man has made wicked by his fall and depravity. The Greek word used for “world” is kosmos, which means order, ornament, decoration, adornment, or the present system of human affairs that are in opposition to God.

John proceeded further than forbidding Christians to love the world when he said “...nor the things in the world...” (I John 2:15 NASB). The apostle referred to things that find their purpose and fulfillment apart from God. There can be only one object of moral devotion. It is either God or that which is opposed to God. The statement “A black or white concept of things is worse than gray” proves the world’s concept of right or wrong has no absolutes. Since the things in the world are loved, they are opposed to God

(Rom. 1:25; James 4:4). To single out one thing in the world is the same as loving the world en masse. John classified the things of the world under three divisions—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (I John 2:16). 2

The love of the world is declared by John to be irreconcilable with the love of the Father: “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (I John 2:16 NASB). The person who loves the world or any part of it gives it first place in his heart and subordinates everything to it. The world becomes his god, and he worships it. He discards whatever competes with the world: “...If [ean] anyone loves [present active subjunctive of agapao] the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (I John 2:15 NASB). The third class condition particle with the subjunctive mood verb is used; therefore, anyone who habitually keeps loving the world is minus the love of the Father. No one can love the world and the Father at the same time any more than he can serve two masters. That would be as impossible as someone trying to be a Christian without first being one.

Some erroneously think Christianity requires one to sacrifice every natural affection; therefore, they try monasticism. They retire from the world and take three vows, each directed at one of the three forms of temptation. The first is the vow of chastity, which is aimed at conquering the “lust of the flesh.” The second is the vow of poverty, which is aimed at conquering the “lust of the eyes.” The third is the vow of obedience, which is aimed at conquering the “boastful pride of life.” However, the hermit without grace is no better than the profligate in the world. Both the unsaved monastic person and the shamelessly immoral person are of the world. The world without is the manifestation of the world within. The only difference between the unregenerate hermit and the shameless profligate is that one hides his sin in some monastery, and the other flaunts his in public. The correct use of the flesh, eye, and life is not worldliness, but the “lust of the

flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” constitute worldliness. Apart from grace, no person can conquer that lust, whether he is in the world or in hiding.

The nature of the forbidden is explained in I John 2:16—“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (NASB). Christianity differs from morality in the value it places on the affections. Morality requires that an act be done on the basis of principle, but Christianity goes deeper to inquire into the state of the heart. Therefore, we are not forbidden to love the sphere of our legitimate activity, but the way in which the love is given constitutes the forbidden. The word “lust” (epithumia) means earnest desire, but that desire can be either pure or impure. The verb form is epithumeo, which means to set the heart on, desire or long for, lust after, or covet.

Worldliness originates within instead of without a person. It never begins with practice. The Bible does not list a catalog of things as worldly. Man makes this list without considering the principle. One may refrain from many things and be as worldly as those who do those things. The principle of worldliness may be as deep-seated in the person who refrains as those who indulge in what is called “the things in the world.” While the abstainer is condemning others, he is planning and scheming a way to make more money, advance in his job, or make a name for himself. The only difference between such a person and others is that his lust is manifested differently. The principle of lust originates within a person. From that principle its fruits are variously manifested.

Worldliness in Christians is spiritual adultery: “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4 NASB). Since James was writing to people he knew would understand the term “adulteresses” under the old economy, he used the metaphorical expression as a warning for Jewish Christians under

the new economy. Christians must not flirt with the world because the world is that order of things that is hostile to God: "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:19 NASB).

The lawful use of the world's comforts for the Christian's well-being is not condemned, but their use of the world's things to gratify their lustful desires is condemned. Saints have to contend with not only worldly things, but also worldly people. Therefore, those who indulge in the world's degrading things or become friends with the people of the world are guilty of spiritual adultery. Children of God must never forget that their complicity with Adam in the fall has wrecked the original world's order. Sin has turned things upside down; the insignificant has replaced the significant; time has become more important than eternity; and the creature is worshipped and served more than the Creator. Christians can love God and enjoy the legitimate things of the world, but they cannot love the evil world system and love God because the world's system is God's enemy.

James' warning in James 4:4 is followed by a remarkable question: "...do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?" (James 4:5 NASB). God never speaks to us through the Scriptures without a purpose in mind. God spoke of Himself as being a "jealous" God (Ex. 20:5; 34:14), and He impressed on the minds of the Israelites the undivided nature of the worship He demanded from them. Therefore, the statement "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy" (James 4:5 KJV) is not meaningless. First, the word "spirit" should be capitalized because James spoke of the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit indwells all Christians (Rom. 8:11), He "lusteth to envy [pros phthonon epipothei] (KJV)." The word translated "lusteth" is the Greek epipotheo, which means to desire earnestly, have a strong bent, or have affection for. The word translated "envy" is phthonos, which means envy or jealousy. Hence, the Holy Spirit who dwells in believers has affection for us to the point of being jealous. The Spirit "dwells" (aorist active indicative of

katokidzo, which means to cause to dwell) in all Christians. This is the jealousy of love. It covets the whole of our love and cannot bear our flirting with the world. The NASB translation is better: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us."

John mentioned three enemies in the world to fellowship in I John 2:16—"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (NASB). These three enemies are inseparably connected with the world that stands in opposition to God. The world system caused by the fall of man (1) hates Christ (John 7:7), (2) is under judgment (John 12:31), (3) is passing away (I Cor. 7:31), (4) is corrupt (II Pet. 1:4), (5) is defiled (II Pet. 2:20), and (6) lies in the power of the evil one (I John 5:19). These are the Biblical descriptions of the world outside, but the Bible also describes the world within in such terms as the "lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life."

The world inside refers to the Christian's flesh and disposition. It is a microcosm within that epitomizes the macrocosm without. The little world inside of men sets in motion the great world outside of them, which is universal. There are justifiable functions for the flesh, the eyes, and the life. However, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life are never vindicated. John never condemned the principle of the flesh, eyes, or life as such. However, he did condemn the manner of life expressed by them.