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1 John 2:15-17

Seventh Message

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WHO HAS YOUR HEART?

SERIES: WHAT GREAT LOVE

The last few weeks we have taken a look at the letter of 1 John and John's focus on the depth of God's love for us. He has encouraged and affirmed his fellow believers that as Christians who have responded by faith to God's saving love in Jesus Christ we are blessed beyond compare. We are God's children. We enjoy fellowship with God through the Spirit of God who dwells within us. By God's grace and mercy we are made new. Our sins are forgiven and we have victory over the evil one.

All of this is great news, but John knows our journey of faith is still a daily battle. Even though we may intellectually know that God loves us, many of us continue to struggle with keeping God at the center of our life and giving ourselves to him whole-heartedly.

No matter how mature we may grow in our faith, temptations that seek to steer us away from God's love and God's way do not come to an end. This is common to believers across the centuries. John was very aware of this battle among his followers, so as a loving pastor he issues both a warning and a promise that we must all hear loud and clear.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If you love the world, love for the Father is not in you. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful people, the lust of their eyes and their boasting about what they have and do — comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17 TNIV)

Entering into God's love calls us to make hard choices. Do we give ourselves, our love, to the Father or to the world? Let's take a close look first at John's warning: "Do not love the world or anything in the world."

John refers to "the world" 23 times in the brief letter of 1 John. It is obvious that relating properly to the world is a key element in living as Jesus did, walking in the light and not the darkness.

It must be made clear that there is no contradiction between what John says here in his letter, "do not love the world", and what he says in his gospel, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

In John 3:16 he is using "the world" to refer to all of fallen humanity in need of redemption. Though they rebel against him, God loves the men and women of this world and sent his Son to save them. Here in 1 John he uses "the world" not to describe fallen humanity, but to refer to the underlying and ungodly passions and pursuits of this sinful world. The way of the world is not harmless. It expresses the attitudes and values that are under the influence of the evil one (1 John 5:19) and stand in opposition to God and his ways.

"If you love the world, love for the Father is not in you." It is easy to be infatuated with the way of the world, but if we love the world that rejects God, then it is obvious that love for the Father is not in

us. Our heart cannot belong to both. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other" (Matt. 6:24). A heart divided is not a heart devoted. I cannot say I love my wife yet have romantic love and affection for another woman. If I do, I truly love neither. This is what James says: "Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

John gives a clear description of the way of the world that comes not from our Heavenly Father, but from the world of sin. "For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful people, the lust of their eyes and their boasting about what they have and do—comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:16).

As you can see, it is not the material nature of the world that John warns against. It is the attitude of the world that is most destructive. The phrase, "cravings of sinful people," is literally 'the desire of the flesh.' It is the desire to please our physical senses at whatever the cost, the attitude that whatever my flesh wants, my flesh gets. It is an attitude that has no consideration for the spiritual world at all, no sense for the presence of God or the desire of God.

The phrase "lust of their eyes" is literally 'the desire of the eyes.' It is the sinful cravings activated by what the eye sees. It is an attitude that seeks to be captivated by the "shine and show," pursuing whatever looks good with no consideration for whether it is truly good. As we know with Eve in the garden looking at the forbidden fruit which was "pleasing to the eye" (Gen. 3:6), and David on the roof of his palace looking lustfully upon Bathsheba as she bathed (2 Sam. 11:2), the "desire of the eyes" can be a powerful force in placing something or someone over God and his way in our life.

But it is not just those things that please our physical senses that have a strong allure. It is also those things that feed our pride that tempt us to move away from the Lord. The phrase "boasting about what they have and do" is literally "the pride of life." It implies being puffed up in pride because of one's position, possessions, and achievements (GPA, college, CEO, etc.). It is an attitude of arrogance that elevates oneself above others. Such an attitude lacks humility and betrays any sense of dependence on God.

Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, gives a similar description of this way of the world:

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." (2 Tim. 3:2-4)

Are you familiar with that world? Do you recognize any of that in yourself? To love the world means to be taken up with all that is in the world in order to satisfy and glorify ourselves – to devote our heart not to God but to the pursuit of whatever pleases our senses,

captivates our eyes, and feeds our selfish pride. John warns us against this way of living. If we're honest, we'll see it for what it is: idolatry.

These kinds of passions and idolatry can take many forms. Several years ago, at a pastor's conference in Canada, we as a pastoral staff went out to dinner with a well-known Christian author and speaker. He was very transparent about his spiritual journey and I'll never forget when he said, "I'm sorry to say I made idols of my children." He went on to describe how, in an effort to be super-dad, his children became the all-consuming focus of his priorities and attention. He admitted that his children fed his pride in an unhealthy way and that ultimately he had to go before the Lord in repentance because they had become, in essence, objects of worship.

That was remarkable honesty and a valuable lesson for me to see how the way of the world can come to us in many subtle and not so subtle ways. We are surrounded by temptations from without and within to worship something or someone other than God. So how do we keep our heart devoted to God?

To help answer that question, John moves from his bold warning to an encouraging promise: "The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17).

A great help in keeping our heart devoted to God is staying close to the heart of God and living from his eternal perspective: "The world and its desires pass away."

Loving the things of this world, John says, is like devoting yourself to a mist, the morning dew. It fades away as quickly as it appears. The words of John remind us not to get sucked into believing and buying into the hype of the world which promises everything but in the end delivers nothing of eternal value. We will not be taking one possession or one title into eternity. It might feel good for the moment, but it all "passes away."

Just last week my wife, Amy, was involved in an auto accident. She was stopped at a traffic light when a car careened around a corner and smashed into the left side of her car. I'm so thankful nobody was hurt. It was a sobering experience for Amy and a clear reminder for both of us that our time is short and the things of this world can be quickly taken away. If our cravings, our lust, our boasting is all about the stuff of this age then we will constantly be in search for more, because none of it will truly satisfy our deepest needs or longings. I'm reminded of the old adage, "What are the two happiest days of a boat owners life? The day he buys the boat ... and the day he sells it."

Of course there is nothing wrong with owning a nice boat, or a nice house, or having a successful career, but we must remember that on their own there is nothing lasting or truly life-giving in them. If our heart is devoted to this world, if we are just living to glorify and please ourselves, then we might have what we seek for a while but it is only a matter of time before it all comes to an end. Our new toys break, our new job is unfulfilling, our pampered bodies wrinkle and break down. The things and ways of this world are not worth the priority position of our heart.

So where should we invest ourselves? John tells us, "Whoever does the will of God lives forever." What helps to keep our heart devoted to the Lord is not only remembering the very brief and ultimately unsatisfactory nature of the things of this world, but entering into God's eternal love and will for us. John encourages us not to give our heart to the priorities and passions of this world, but to give our

heart to our eternal Heavenly Father and the priorities and passions of his heart.

What is the passion of God? What is the will of God? In 1 John, doing the will of God clearly involves believing in his Son and loving one another: "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them" (1 John 3:23-24a).

The will of God is for all humanity to know him, to enter into his love by faith in Jesus Christ, and to obediently live in the power of that love through the presence of his Spirit within us. Those who give their heart to the world and its passions will share the fate of the passing world they have clung to. Those who cling to our eternal Father, anchored in his life through his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who dwells within, will live forever.

This present age is temporary, but God's will and those who do it are eternal. We should invest ourselves accordingly. As Jesus said,

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...so do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt. 6:19-21, 31-33)

Paul picks up on this theme when he writes to Timothy:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. (1Tim. 6:17-19)

Where is your treasure? Are you taking hold of the life that is truly life? Placing our heart and our treasure into the stuff of this age is like continuing to drink water that never quenches our thirst. As Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14).

Jesus used another phrase: "Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...will be filled" (Matthew 5:6). Though short-term pleasure and temporary status have an allure, we know that they do not satisfy our deepest yearnings or longings. It is God alone who fills us and satisfies us.

God has invited us into a better life than that which the world offers. The false love of the world is attractive until we see and experience a much deeper and satisfying love. The implications of how to live my life comes into play only when I know the God who is love and who loves me. We are only able to refuse the tempting offers of the world when we know in the depth of our soul that our Heavenly Father loves us.

So how do we grow in appreciating and expressing God's love? We must remember that our love comes from God. As John says later in

this letter, “love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7).

If we are to have hearts devoted to our Heavenly Father we must first start by entering into and immersing ourselves in his love. John is echoing what Jesus said, “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:9-10).

We grow in God’s love by abiding in his love, by remaining close to him, obeying his commands, spending time with him in prayer, drinking deeply from his word, and by entering into fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

One of the most powerful ways we can resist the allure of the world is to experience God’s love through the body of Christ – God’s Spirit at work among us. When we love one another, as Christ loves, we gain a very real and fresh experience of God’s love for us. When I struggle with feeling as though God’s love is distant, the love of God I experience through you, my Christian brothers and sisters, is a very tangible and powerful blessing.

The Apostle Paul gives us a glimpse of what it looks like to express the love and the will of God to one another:

Live in peace with one another. We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. (1Th. 5:13-16)

God’s will is that we love him and love one another. As we live in God’s love, redeemed and transformed through faith in Jesus Christ and filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are able to love the Lord God with all that we are and love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus prayed to his Father that his followers would live this way:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. (John 17:15-18)

This is why we must never interpret John’s exhortation to “not love the world” as a pretense to withdraw from the world. Jesus consistently invested himself in showing love for all kinds of sinners, yet his heart was always for his Father. We are salt and light. God does not want us to turn our back on those in need of his love. Far from it, we are Christ’s ambassadors sent into the world to share the good news that God loves each and every one of us, and we can be reconciled to God through his Son Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

Can you think of a better way to invest yourself? Our text this morning invites us to ask ourselves, “Am I investing my heart in what will draw me nearer to God or farther away from him?” “Am I focusing on what will bring glory to me, or on what will bring glory to God?”

The allure of the world is strong, so it has been my hope today and over the last few weeks to help you enter into God’s love and be so captured by it that you give him all your love in return. Who has your heart? Does someone or something, from time to time, pull against God’s hold on your heart?

I encourage you to invite the Lord to reveal to you ways in which you can mature and grow in receiving his love and expressing his love toward others. I’m reminded of the psalmist’s prayer, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).

As the Lord answers that prayer, it is my hope that you are reminded that you are his beloved child, that he is in you and you are in him. So let’s live strong in that love, and with delight step into the beautiful opportunities before us. May we live not in fear but in freedom. May we live not in selfishness but with generosity as we lay down our lives for one another in joy and the power of the Holy Spirit.

I know that so many of you have invested your heart with God, and I’ve seen how everything else flows from that. Your passions and priorities have flowed from your relationship with your Heavenly Father and I’ve seen how you have glorified the Lord with the choices you’ve made with your job, your family, your friends, and your possessions. It is a beautiful thing to behold, and a blessing for so many. I give thanks for you and the wonderful witness you are to our community and me. My hope and prayer is that you stay close to the heart of God, giving him your heart fully, and continue to invite him to search out your heart and lead you in the everlasting way.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to give God your heart. Worship him and present to him all that you are as a living sacrifice. Do not conform to the way of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (based on Romans 12:1-2)

