

**RCC in the Word**  
**Week of January 7**  
**1 John 2:15-17**

15 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 in possessions—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.

There are some passages of Scripture which are a bit challenging to understand - for example, Revelation. But other passages of the Bible are really quite simple. They are easy to understand. In fact, they are so easy to understand that I fear we face two dangers by their simplicity. One danger is that we read right over them. The passage is translated easily into clear English, it's easy to understand, and our eyes kind of glaze over it as we read. The other danger though, is that we equate simplicity with ease. But most often in reality, the opposite is true. It is the simplest teachings that are often the most difficult to implement. But if we can implement the simple teachings into our lives, then we are usually very greatly rewarded. We will look at one of these passages today.

This short paragraph contains one command, and that command is certainly the main point of the paragraph - "Do not love the world or the things in the world." The form of this command suggests that John is forbidding the continuance of an action that is already taking place. A false teaching has crept into the church that said that you could be a Christian and live like the world. This fits with what we know about this letter as a whole. The false teachers were teaching you could love both God and the world. Maybe they weren't explicitly teaching this in words, but it was subtly demonstrated in actions.

What is the world that John tells us not to love? It is not creation. It is the world that man has made. The world that man controls. It is the stuff that exists because of what man has created. It is everything that is a part of this world that man has made. What does love mean? Here it means to strive after, to try to get, to desire. It is an issue of the heart. It is our desires. Don't desire the world, John says, desire God.

Three reasons John tells us not to love the world:

1) Every person loves either the world or God, but he cannot love both.

If we love God, then our love for the world will decrease. If we love the world though, our love for God will decrease. We can't love them both at the same time. This presents us with a choice. We must each choose to be fully devoted to God. Half-hearted devotion to God doesn't really exist. That will lead you on the

path of Demas (see 2 Tim 4:10). Rather, by God's mercy and grace, we can rest on the righteousness of Christ. The only one who would and could ever fully satisfy this command. He loved God perfectly. And if you are in Him, then you too, claim his righteousness. So that God looks on you and sees a perfect righteousness and a perfect love for God. That is our status before God. In this world, though, we aim to match what we are in God's eyes. John is calling us to live as who we really are.

2) People who love the world will suffer eternal death.

The world is passing away. The world's desires are passing away. And thus those who desire the world are passing away as well. Do you want to pass away? Is that what you desire? Wouldn't it be such a waste if all your life you came to church, served in the church, and at the end heard Jesus say those words, "Depart from me I never knew you?" That is where we end up when we try to live with both a love for God and a love for the world.

3) People who love God will enjoy eternity with him.

For John, loving God was the same thing as doing his will. So as John in this letter is writing to the church about identifying false brothers and false teachers. Here he offers another test. A way to know if you truly love God, rather than the world, is to see if you do the will of God. And doing the will of God, John summarizes, as keeping his commandments. Obedience to what God has commanded is the sure sign of love for God.

We must also have a right love for God. Jonathan Edwards wrote, "Real Christians do not first see that God loves them, and later on find out that He is lovely. They first see that God is lovely, that Christ is excellent and glorious. Their hearts are captivated by this view of God, and their love for God arises chiefly from this view. True love begins with God and loves Him for His own sake." Our greatest desire must be to love and glorify God. So whether we eat, drink, talk with a neighbor, go on a hike, play a sport, visit the grand canyon, swim in the ocean, discipline our children, join a book club, or anything else we do, our aim in all of that is to love and glorify God. That is the life God has called us to. If that is your heart's desire, above all else, that's how we remain in the world but not of it. And that is how we love God and not the world.

Desires are good. God has given us many desires. But when our desires become all-consuming such that our hearts focus in on them and not on God. Then we are in a dangerous place and have allowed a love of something else to take the place in our hearts that only God deserves. Let me summarize how Augustine said it, "A man loves God too little when he loves anything together with God if he loves it not for God's sake." We can love many things. But if we love them for their sake alone, and not for God's sake, then we love God too little. Our loves must be derived from our love for God.

We have a command, and thus with it comes a choice. Will we listen to what John, to what God has commanded us. He has given us three reasons to obey. They are both promises and warnings. Promises for those who obey. And warnings for those who disobey and choose to love the world. Will we love God, or love the world? Will you desire God, or will you desire the world?

We must love God above all else. Make him your desire. Love him because of who he is, not because of what he has given you. And this love is not something that we can simply make happen. We love because God first loved us. You must be born again to love God. You can only love God by a miraculous work in your heart wrought by the Spirit of God. He actually gives you a new heart, so that you are capable of loving God. By faith in Christ, we truly love God and reject the world.

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