

**DON'T LOVE THE WORLD****1 JOHN 2:15-17**

Let's start today by everyone just saying a big, collective "Yuck!" That's a truly cringe worthy image, isn't it? I hear there's a cartoon of a dog who had been drinking out of a toilet bowl. With water dripping from his snout, the dog looks up and tells us, "It doesn't get any better than this!" That's also a graphic, unpleasant, but accurate image of what it means to be worldly. Worldliness is when we consider good what God knows is bad. We accept what God rejects. We enjoy what God despises. We drink up spiritually stagnant, dirty and worthless substitutes when God offers us what is spiritually fresh, clean and priceless. Worldliness. It can show up in the life of a new convert or a mature believer.

So, we're in the midst of a series of message on 1 John. KISS: Keep It Simple, Saint. Nobody said following Jesus was easy. But it doesn't have to be complicated or confusing either. John wanted us to know how to identify real, genuine, authentic followers of Jesus. He kept coming back to three tests or marks of spiritual authenticity. One, doctrinal accuracy. Get Jesus right – who He is and what He did. Two, growth in a godly lifestyle. Jesus' followers are expected to become more Jesus-like in our actions and attitudes. Three, loving God's people. Christians do relationships differently and it begins with fellow Jesus followers. All three of those tests or marks are equally important to spiritual authenticity. Let's read the next section of 1 John for today's message. See if you can discern which tests or marks John addressed. I think those three verses are all about the second mark or test. Followers of Jesus keep growing in a godly lifestyle over their lives. So, I'd like to ask and try to answer three questions today having to do with worldliness. Here's the first one:

**WHAT IS NOT BEING WORLDLY?**

Understanding what something is not can be very helpful in understanding what something is. First, when you appreciate the natural, physical world God has created that is not what the Bible means by being worldly. In fact, in the Bible's account of creation, we read this: "Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!" (Gen. 1:31 NLT) The physical world we live in is one way God has revealed Himself to us. When you enjoy being out in the woods, swimming in the ocean, looking at a sunset, or fishing in a lake, you are actually giving glory to God and praising Him for His work. It can be a form of worship. That's not worldliness.

Second, when you love ungodly people and associate with them that is not what the Bible means by being worldly either. The most familiar verse in the entire Bible says, "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (Jo. 3:16 NLT) God loves broken down, sinful, corrupt, morally bankrupt human beings so much He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins and make it possible for us to have an eternal relationship with us. How are human beings supposed to find out what God has done for them? God's strategy is very clear. Those who have already received God's love

and forgiveness are supposed to tell those who haven't experienced God's forgiveness yet. That requires a personal relationship, interaction, friendship, and association.

Over the centuries, some followers of Jesus have concluded that the only way to become truly godly in your attitudes and actions is to withdraw from ungodly people. There's a lot of problems with that attempt to avoid worldliness. It contradicts Jesus' attitudes and actions towards spiritually lost people. He was strongly criticized by the religious elite of His day for being far too friendly with morally marginal people. Here's another problem with avoiding worldly people. It sabotages evangelism. How are worldly people ever supposed to find out about Jesus if all the people who love God cut them out of their lives? Here's yet another problem. Withdrawal from worldly people never results in becoming godly yourself. The problem of worldliness is right here in your own heart not just out there in the heart of some spiritually lost individual.

Third, participating in activities worldly people enjoy - but the Bible never prohibits - is not being worldly either. Some of you know exactly what I mean and some of you are saying, "Huh?" Let me explain. I grew up in a conservative, religious environment that not only strongly discouraged me from associating with any non-Christians, but it also equated certain activities automatically with worldliness even if the Bible never said anything about those activities. You were worldly if you smoked, drank alcohol, danced, played cards (we could play Rook but not with regular playing cards because of their association with gambling), went to movies (because ungodly people were there), or even went bowling (because worldly people were there, too, and some of those places sell alcohol). Now, sure, some activities worldly people enjoy the Bible clearly prohibits. Stay away from those! For instance, no Christian should be within a mile of a drunken orgy or a party where everyone is getting high on drugs. But simply participating in activities worldly people enjoy doesn't make you worldly. You soon discover that worldliness isn't a spiritual disease you're in danger of catching from other people or certain activities. It's a spiritual disease you already have and for which you desperately need a cure. Well, if all that is not being worldly, the obvious next question is...

## **WHAT IS BEING WORLDLY?**

We've all heard someone talk about "the world of politics," "the world of sports," or "the world of business." We know it means an invisible, but very real, organized system. When the Bible uses the word "world" in this way, it means a highly complex, spiritual network of anti-God and anti-Jesus beliefs and approaches to life and living that has invaded every human being, every human family, and every human structure. It pervades all of human life at every level. It includes methods, values, goals, ideologies, and strategies. But it's also infected every human institution: politics, economics, business, education, sports – anything and everything. On the surface, much of the world doesn't look evil or dangerous at all. In fact, it looks pretty normal, but it's manipulated by the devil himself who doesn't want you to know he's the one pulling the strings. A little later in this same letter, John wrote, "The world around us is under the control of the evil one." (1 Jo. 5:19 NLT) When you get below the surface of the world, you discover it's utterly hostile to God and completely rejects the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many times when you find the word “world” in the Bible, it means all of that and more. For example, you hear it in this stern warning, “Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.” (Ja. 4:4 NLT) Worldliness, then, is when a follower of Jesus just goes along with this ungodly, satanically controlled system of ungodly values, attitudes, and behavior. When we buy into it at some level, fail to discern it, thoughtlessly fall into it, become loyal to it, or perceive no danger in it – that’s when we’ve become worldly. Worldliness is just going along with the world! It’s kind of like having one foot on the dock and one foot in the canoe. It doesn’t work! Eventually, you have to make a choice and throw yourself in one direction or the other.

What is being worldly? Secondly, worldliness is living out ungodly desires and attitudes. When John used the word “world”, he clearly didn’t mean the physical planet we live on. Or even the ungodly people who live in it. He defined it for us here. John zeroes in on corrupted human desires and attitudes. He wrote, “For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure....” (1 Jo. 2:16 NLT) We’ve been created by God to feel things like hunger, thirst, the need for sleep, and sexual desire. In and of themselves, those are God-given and wholesome desires. But people try to satisfy those appetites in ways that destroy both us and others. Eating can become gluttony. Drinking can become drunkenness. Sleeping can turn into laziness. Sexual desire can get expressed outside of marriage. John continued, “... a craving for everything we see....” (1 Jo. 2:16 NLT) It’s taking the legitimate enjoyment of material things – houses, cars, clothes, a certain kind of lifestyle – one step further so that you now covet them. It makes being a consumer the primary goal of life. It’s materialism. It’s often demonstrated in an unhealthy love for luxury and possessions. John added, “...and pride in our achievements and possessions.” (1 Jo. 2:16 NLT) Worldliness loves and needs to feel superior to others. So, you measure your importance by what you’ve done, what you have, and you love to point it out to others. It’s arrogance. That’s worldliness.

What is being worldly? Thirdly, worldliness is allowing God’s gifts to replace God Himself in my life. Worldliness often involves things that aren’t sinful in and of themselves. God has given you so much in this world for your use and your enjoyment – food, clothing, making love to your spouse, sports, travel, recreation, interesting careers, art, music, starting a new business, studying the sciences, technology – just to name a few of His gifts. By the same token, he wants you to be ambitious, achieve your potential, and be excellent in all you do. But, sadly, you can allow those legitimate, good things to take too big a place in your life. They become the focus of your attention, your interest, your passion, and your enthusiasm. Ultimately, they take the place of God in your life which is idolatry. When God’s gifts take the place of God – that’s worldliness.

What is being worldly? Let me just throw out four current examples so that you can better appreciate the range, the depth, and the complexity of worldliness. Now the Bible teaches that your chief purpose in life is to know God and serve Him, but every day the culture we live in preaches, “The chief purpose of your life is to consume stuff.” We’ve become largely oblivious to how consumerism infects and pervades our culture. You

see it in our advertising, our endless stores, online shopping, and restaurants - our entire approach to life and living. The meaning of life is to buy stuff, use stuff, sell stuff and obtain more stuff. Followers of Jesus give ample evidence that we're as sold out to consumerism as non-followers of Jesus. Look at how we use money. Many of us live on credit. Many of us have consumer debt out the whazoo. Many of us can only afford to give the Lord a pitiful tip in terms of our financial giving – certainly not the tithe. Look at even how most Christians pick a church. Who's got the best preacher? Who's got the best music? Who's got the best kids' or youth program? How many Christians do you think pick a church because first and foremost they want to serve instead of being served? Let a guy who has pastored for forty years tell you: not many!

Here's another example of worldliness. The world says, "Personal morality doesn't matter to God." Most Christians know it's sinful to have sex outside of marriage, but many people who confess Jesus as Lord and Savior live together before marriage. Many more of us indulge in what someone has called "vicarious immorality." We secretly enjoy reading or hearing about the sexual misconduct of celebrities. We rationalize watching movies and reading books with explicit sexual content. Women dress immodestly because our culture says your value and worth, ladies, is based on your ability to attract the opposite sex. Men indulge in long, lingering, and lustful looks at an attractive woman thinking that it does no harm to anyone. But it does bring harm to us and it does matter to God. My personal morality absolutely matters to God.

"Societal injustice doesn't matter to God." Yes, it does. It's yet another example of worldliness. Some conservative, evangelical followers of Jesus have had to learn that racism is worldliness. Many more of us have had to wrestle with the fact that God may be just as opposed to free market capitalism as He is to godless communism if it results in groups of people being dehumanized. God hates hunger. God hates the rich taking advantage of the poor. God hates it when some people become so desperate through no fault of their own that they decide their only choice is to become a migrant or a refugee. God hates any systematic oppression by one group of people over another group of people. God hates that some people have more advantages and opportunities than others. Those are all expressions of a broken world or worldliness.

Here's another dominant expression of worldliness in our own culture: "Admire Jesus, but don't be passionate about Him." The devil is usually far too subtle to get people to hate or reject Jesus outright. He will encourage you to respect Jesus, to respect the Bible, to respect the local church, but – at the end of the day – to treat them as totally irrelevant to your own life. And sometimes even followers of Jesus fall into that kind of worldliness. How so? When it comes to the real place Jesus has in your life, there's this pressure not to get too passionate or too excited about following Jesus. Don't go overboard. Stay balanced. Don't appear to be fanatical or over the top. My friend, when it comes to Jesus and you find yourself being spiritually lethargic, cold, and unmoved - you are worldly. When the things of God evoke no passion in you and you're no longer gripped and moved by all that God is, all that He has done and will yet do, have you not become altogether worldly? Worldliness is when you're no longer passionate about Jesus. Here's a final question to ask and try to answer:

## HOW CAN I AVOID BEING WORLDLY?

The Bible assumes that worldliness is going to be an issue for every follower of Jesus. So, first of all, realize that avoiding worldliness is a personal and daily challenge. The Bible says, "Dear friends, I warn you as temporary residents and foreigners to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls." (1 Pt 2:11 NLT) Only a follower of Jesus can be guilty of worldliness. A person who doesn't follow Jesus can't be anything else but worldly. You can only ever begin to avoid worldliness when you realize it's going to be a challenge, a struggle, and a personal issue you will deal with your whole life long. Sometimes you just want to give in and be worldly. Other times you want to resist the world and be like Jesus. If you don't sense that tension every day and already know what I'm talking about, I seriously doubt whether you're really a follower of Jesus. Every day you answer the question, "Is Jesus the Lord of my life? Is Jesus the Lord of every part of my life?" Every child of God is susceptible to becoming worldly. No one is safe or secure from its temptation. One of the saddest verses in the Bible is a reference Paul, the great Christian leader, made about one of his associates in ministry – a man named Demas. "Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica...." (2 Tim 4:10 NIV) What ever happened to Demas? We don't know, but evidently he just began to let this world's outlook govern and control his heart and mind.

Christians are kind of like scuba divers. The ocean is not our natural environment. We can live and function in that environment, but only with special equipment. When you become a follower of Jesus, this world is no longer your natural environment. Oh, you can live in it, but now you need special spiritual equipment. You need the spiritual oxygen of prayer, God's Word, the Holy Spirit's presence, and other followers of Jesus to still survive and thrive while living in the world. You're going to have to learn how to manage that spiritual reality until the day God takes you to live in your new home – your real home – the new Heaven and the new Earth.

How else can you avoid being worldly? Secondly, you must discern how to be in the world but not of the world. I respect and admire the Amish in many ways. I consider them to be brothers and sisters in Christ. But I don't buy into their answer to worldliness. By the same token, much spiritual depth and richness has come down to us through the monastic movement – Christian men and women who literally shut themselves off from worldly pursuits to pursue their relationship with God. That's not the biblical model for true godliness. I'm fascinated instead by what the Bible says about how to live in the world but not be like the world. It says, "The time that remains is very short.... Those who use the things of the world should not become attached to them. For this world as we know it will soon pass away." (1 Cor. 7:29, 31 NLT) Yes, you do live in this world. Yes, you are meant to use the things of this world. Just don't get attached to the things of this world, or engrossed in them, or preoccupied with them. That's when worldliness creeps in. You have to develop the habit of living discerningly.

Here's a final thought on avoiding worldliness. Thirdly, you must pursue being God-focused instead of avoiding being worldly-focused. You don't become godly just by

avoiding being worldly. You become godly by staying focused on God. Focus your life increasingly on God – who He is, what matters to Him, receiving and entering into His Kingdom, serving Him, knowing Him, loving Him – and you will over time become more godly and less worldly. The world is focused on everything else but God and what matters to God. Look around! You'll find many worldly people who are nice, decent, moral folk, but they're utterly focused on this life and this world. In stark contrast, followers of Jesus are focused on Jesus. That's what the Bible means when it says, "Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven.... Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth." (Col 3:1-2 NLT) How does the old song put it? "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."

Dr. Temple Grandin, a scientist, is researching new ways to kill cows gently. Why? If cows experience high stress levels prior to being butchered, hormones get released that lower the meat quality. So, Dr. Grandin has been exploring how to keep cows calm and happy as they are being led to slaughter. Her research has led to one simple insight: novelty distresses cows. The key is to keep everything in their lives feeling and looking as normal and natural as possible. Don't yell at the cows. Don't use cattle prods. If you just keep cows contented and comfortable, they'll go wherever they're led. Don't surprise them. Don't unnerve them. Above all, don't hurt them (well, at least until, you kill them!).

Dr. Grandin has even developed a new technology that has revolutionized the ways of the big slaughter operations. In this system the cows aren't prodded off the truck but are led, in silence, onto a ramp. They go through a "squeeze chute," a gentle pressure device that mimics a mother cow's nuzzling touch. The cattle continue down the ramp onto a smoothly curving path. No sudden turns. It feels like they're going home. As they mosey along the path, they don't even notice when their hooves are no longer touching the ground. A conveyor belt slightly lifts them gently upward, and then a blunt instrument levels a surgical strike right between the eyes. Those cows transition instantly from livestock to meat. They were never aware enough to be alarmed by it. The end result of Dr. Grandin's new, more humane methods is exactly the same as the old, more brutal ones. The cow is dead.

There is a spiritual force right now trying to fatten you up for consumption and destruction. It wants to steer you towards a cosmic slaughterhouse as calmly and with as little struggle as possible. Worldliness encourages you not to question what the culture around you preaches. Just live your life by doing what comes naturally. Live and let live. Because it seems so easy, you'll conclude this is the way things ought to be. The more peaceful you feel, the more endangered you are. But when all is said and done, worldliness will just flat out kill you spiritually. So don't be fooled! This world looks like it will last forever, but the Bible says, "And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever." (1 John 2:17 NLT)