

1 John

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1 John 2:15-17

Vs. 15

- One of the problems the church has faced since the advent of modern psychology is the way that secular psychology has crept into church practice and theology. Only in recent times have we given any consideration to the idea of truth being not black and white, but various shades of grey, leading the church to be conflicted on a variety of issues and in a variety of areas. Scripture has no such internal conflict. In scripture truth is never relative, nor individualized. Truth in scripture is always clear. Jesus said in Matthew 12:30, "He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters". Jesus says similar things in both Mark and Luke and here in 1 John, the beloved disciple takes the same position. In scripture truth is always black and white. There is no room for any kind of relative truth. You will never hear "well that may be your truth but this is my truth" as if there were as many different truths as there were people. In John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am THE Way, THE Truth, and The Life...", making it clear that there is only one Way, only Truth, only one way for us to Life.
- Here, John takes that same point of divide to separate the church and "the world". But what does John mean by the world? He says here in vs. 15 that we are not to love the world, yet in his own gospel he quotes Jesus saying that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.
- The Christian is not to hate the world, per se. The Christian understands that the world is God's good creation and that the Lord does all things well. Time and again Jesus took examples from the beauty of the earth to demonstrate God's love grace and mercy. The Christian *should be* the world's leading environmentalists as we have been charged with caring for God's creation. The Christian affirms that the earth is the Lords and the fulness thereof.

- But by the time of Christ “the world” had taken on a moral and ethical meaning. It had come to mean a way of life totally apart from God. The early 20th century Welsh theologian CH Dodd defined the term as “human society in so far as it is organized on wrong principles, and characterized by base desires, false values, and egoism.” William Barclay sums up by saying, “In other words, to John the world was nothing other than pagan society with its false values and its false gods.” Here then in 1 John “the world” is not to be understood in the same way as the world God so loved, but rather as the world that has rejected its creator and savior.
- So as we go deeper into 1 John, we need to set our sophisticated modern psychology aside. There is only one Truth and only one Way. Again Barclay sums up nicely: “To this day the Christian cannot escape the obligation to be different from the world. In this passage John sees things as he always sees them--in terms of black and white. As Westcott has it: ‘There cannot be a vacuum in the soul.’ This is a matter in which there is no neutrality; a man either loves the world or he loves God, Jesus himself said, ‘No one can serve two masters’ (Matthew 6:24). The ultimate choice remains the same. Are we to accept the world's standards or the standards of God?”

Vs. 16

- Here John basically breaks down the world into 3 primary qualities: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride. A) When we think of the lust of the flesh we are primarily thinking of sexual sin. But for John and the people of his time, the lust of the flesh meant something far more. In the New Testament the flesh is all that which exists outside of God's grace. It includes selfish ambition and valuing only the material things of life. It is to live a life dominated by the senses. It is to be a gluttonous eater, extravagant with things of luxury, excessive in pleasure, lustful and lax in morals, selfish in regard to possessions, holding spiritual values in no regard, extravagant in self-gratification, and making a priority of all material desires. This is the person who has made his own comfort into an idol, who disregards any ethic but that of his own construction, and has unwittingly but happily become a slave to his own desires. B) How is the lust of

the eyes different that the lust of the flesh? This has more to do with the material things of life. In John's time it was all about putting on a good show. A person may be in serious debt, but to keep up appearances they take on more debt to look good to their peers. You may not actually *BE* prosperous, but it doesn't matter as long as you *LOOK* prosperous. The lust of the eyes is the attitude which believes that happiness is to be found in the things which money can buy and the eye can see. Here there is no value other than the material value. C) The boastful pride of life: The Greek word here is *alazoneia*. To the Greeks the alazon is the one who takes credit for someone else's work; someone who is pretentious; someone who is constantly bragging and name dropping; someone whose ego enters a room 5 minutes before their body does. When Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for making such a loud show of their giving at the Temple, (Matt. 6:2), blowing trumpets and having a herald go ahead of them announcing them, the pharisee is the alazon.

- Pride, self-gratification, self-importance, these are the common qualities of "the world" as John knows "the world".

Vs. 17

- Here again it's all black and white. So we all have a choice to make: are we going to choose the world's way or are we going to choose the way of Christ?
- To John's mind this is a simple question. Jesus has told him that the world and it's life is all passing away. And John has lived long enough to see how all of that which the world offers is empty and meaningless. It may look good but turns to ash in your mouth, leaving you with a bad taste and still hungry. He has seen the wild extravagance of Nero and other Roman emperors and he has seen how all of it has come to nothing. None of it is permanent and none of it offers any real future. But the one who follows the way of Christ, who lives a life in Christ and with Christ in him, has found the things of eternity, things that are rich in purpose and meaning.
- One writer has said "The man of the world is doomed to disappointment, asking 'is this all there is?'; the man of God is certain of lasting joy."