

Do Not Love the World
(1 John 2:15-2:17)
Expository Lessons from the First Letter of John

I. Background

- a. John started his letter with a call for Christians to admit and confess their sins.
- b. He then said (covered in the previous lesson):
 - i. We know Jesus only *if we keep His commandments*.
 - ii. And even more challenging, the one who abides in Him ought to *walk as he walked* – a way of life of imitating Jesus and walking in his footsteps.
 - iii. Anyone who hates his brother is in spiritual darkness; and has become blind.
- c. Our last lesson closed with sort of a poem within the letter from John, that spoke of people in three groups: children, fathers and young men.
 - i. John called for the young men to be strong, men who overcome Satan.

II. Do Not Love the World (Read 1 John 2:15-17)

- a. John gives a powerful call: Do not love the world or anything in it!
 - i. Anyone who loves the world *cannot* have the love of the Father in him.
 - ii. The three-fold temptation offered by the world:
 - 1. The lust of the flesh,
 - 2. The lust of the eyes, and
 - 3. The pride of life.
 - iii. Contrast:
 - 1. Lust of the world is *passing away*; BUT
 - 2. The man who does the will of God *abides forever*.
- b. **Question:** Is this teaching from John here, “don’t love the world”, based on things that Jesus himself had taught?
 - i. Note that this teaching in John’s first letter strikes against the things most people today are living for: things that feed our pride or the desires of our flesh.

- c. Let us first consider what Jesus taught on this subject; perhaps expressing the *same idea* as John but using different words. After all, we have “one Teacher, the Christ” (**Matthew 23:8-10**). Jesus is our *ultimate* teacher.
- i. Read **Luke 16:9-15**. This teaching follows the parable of the unjust steward. Even though the steward in this story is crooked, Jesus commends his shrewdness, in taking unusual measures to provide for his future life. The points Jesus makes here include:
1. Use your money (unrighteous mammon) to make friends who will receive you into an everlasting home.
 - a. Give your wealth to others who need it. By sharing, you will make friends.
 2. The shrewd manager will be *concerned about his future*.
 - a. For us, that means being concerned about the Day of Judgment and where we will spend eternity.
 3. It is *impossible* to love both God and mammon (money, wealth).
 4. How you handle material goods will impact where you spend eternity.
 5. ([An extended side discussion here.](#)) Recently a few people have asked me about the Apocrypha, the books included in the Old Testament of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, but not in modern Protestant Bibles.
 - a. These books were in the original King James Version (1611); and were still in there well over 250 years later, in the late 1800’s (in an old family Bible from the Protestant side of my family). So only removed fairly recently (within the last 150 years or so; I’ve heard the claim they were removed in 1885).
 - i. These books include **Judith, Tobit, Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach**, etc.
 - ii. The word “Apocrypha” is from a Greek word that means “hidden”. Since over time the term has taken on a negative sense, some prefer to refer to these books as “Deuterocanonical” (second canon).
 - b. One verse that is often pointed to by opponents of these books (those who do *not* think they should be considered inspired) is found in **Wisdom of Sirach**. (This book is sometimes also called

Ecclesiasticus, not to be confused with similar-sounding Old Testament book, '**Ecclesiastes**'.)

- i. "Water extinguishes a burning fire, and alms will make atonement for sin." (**Sirach 3:30**, LES)
- ii. It is rather clear why Luther and Protestants (who teach that works have nothing to do with salvation) would not like what this verse says.
- c. However, there are other passages in Scripture that express similar sentiments (that giving alms to the poor can have a positive impact on one's eternal life).
 - i. Note that in **Daniel 4:27** in the LXX, Daniel tells king Nebuchadnezzar, after the king is ready to repent: "...*atone for your sins with alms and your wrongdoing with compassion on the poor. Perhaps God will be longsuffering regarding your trespasses.*"
 1. The picture here is that when the king repents (of oppressing others and using his wealth to build monuments to his pride) and restores to the poor what he had previously withheld, God could extend mercy and forgive him.
 - ii. This is the same sentiment expressed in **Ezekiel 18** and **33**. When the ungodly man repents at the end of his life and "does judgment and righteousness, restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen...none of his sins committed will be remembered...by doing these things he shall live." (**Ezekiel 33:14-16**)
 1. True repentance involves more than no longer sinning. It also includes making restitution (where possible) to others you have sinned against.
 - iii. This is the same thing we see in Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus, the rich chief tax collector. Zacchaeus said, "Look, Lord I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold". To that Jesus replied, "Today salvation has come to this house..." (**Luke 19:8-9**)
 1. Note that Jesus did *NOT* rebuke Zacchaeus for relying on works to save himself, and for not understanding that salvation is a free gift from God! Rather, Jesus was pleased with his response and commended the man.

- iv. To say that someone can atone for their sins of greed and selfishness by repenting and restoring what they should have given to the poor is consistent with what we see elsewhere in Scripture.
 1. However, this is *not* the same as saying you can just give money to the church to cover for any sins you commit (like adultery) or to cover for the sins of another person who is already deceased!
 2. That tragic distortion was the justification for the Roman Catholic Church selling indulgences in the Middle Ages in Europe.
 3. Reaction against this corrupt money-making operation was one of the contributing factors in Luther's break with the Catholic Church, and the start of the Protestant Reformation.
- v. Consider what Jesus said in the **Luke 16** passage we just read.
- vi. Also, in **Luke 12** Jesus said, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and *give alms*; provide yourselves *money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail*, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (**Luke 12:32-34**, NKJV)
- vii. In the story Jesus tells of the Rich Man and Lazarus (**Luke 16:19-30**), the problem with the rich man that leads him to the place of torment is that he did not help poor Lazarus who was begging at his gate.
 1. This strikes me as an application of what Jesus had said in the Sermon on the Plain, in **Luke 6**: "*But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.*" (**Luke 6:24-25**, NKJV)
 2. The rich person being condemned in **Luke 6** sounds just like the kind of man Lazarus was, in **Luke 16**. The problem: the rich man enjoying his wealth, doing nothing to help the poor.
- viii. When the Rich Young Ruler (**Luke 18:18-23**) asks Jesus what he needs to do to inherit eternal life, what does Jesus say?

- ix. What is the difference between the sheep and goats in **Matthew 25:31-46**? Both believe in Jesus and call him 'Lord'. However, the *sheep* (those who will be saved) are those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, etc.
 - x. In **Acts 10:1-4** an angel appears to Cornelius and tells him, "Your prayers and *your alms have come up for a memorial before God.*"
6. Regardless of whether or not you accept the Apocrypha (also called Deuterocanonical books) as inspired Scripture, the idea that giving alms (or not) can impact our eternal destiny is also clearly taught by Jesus in the New Testament. Loving others and giving to the poor is a core Christian characteristic; and restoring to others what you had withheld is a natural part of repentance.
7. Not loving the world, and the things of the world means:
- a. Not loving and living for the things that the world seeks: wealth, fame, status, pleasure, comfort and entertainment.
 - b. We can't be living like the rich man in the story of Lazarus, or like the goats in the story of **Matthew 25** about the sheep and goats.
 - c. This is the danger of the third soil, which is devastating the lives of so many professing Christians in the West. In the Parable of the Sower (found in **Matthew 13**, **Mark 4** and **Luke 8**), Jesus speaks of the seed (the word of God) being scattered and falling onto four different types of soil, representing four different hearts. The first soil represents those who never believe; while the second, third and fourth soils represent those who do believe, yet have different outcomes.
Regarding the third soil:
 - i. The initial description: "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it." (**Luke 8:7**, NKJV)
 - ii. The explanation: "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, *riches, and pleasures of life*, and bring no fruit to maturity." (**Luke 8:14**, NKJV)
 - iii. Let us see the love of riches and pleasure as Jesus describes it here: a deadly weed that wants to wrap its tentacles around your neck and pleasantly strangle you to death! Let us take out the machete, cut it down and free ourselves of this menacing weed!

1. This is exactly what most people are living for. They work hard in order to have enough to enjoy the pleasures of this life: to eat and drink and enjoy every pleasure this life has to offer.
2. Unfortunately, many Christians and even church leaders, in a misguided attempt to “make the gospel attractive” to the world, try to use the world (the thorns) to draw others in.
 - a. They tell unbelievers they can maximize their pleasure in this life, plus also get the bonus of eternal life, if they just become Christians. They can have all the things the world wants, plus more!
 - b. The false “prosperity gospel” is the most blatant example of this; but more subtle variations of this creep into other churches as well. This is *NOT* the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- d. Paul warned Timothy about the danger of love for the world, which would enter the church at a later time.

1. Read **1 Timothy 6:6-11**.

- a. Godliness with contentment is great gain.
- b. The desire to become rich leads many to destruction.
- c. Love of money is the root of *all kinds of evil*.
- d. Paul admonishes Timothy to *flee from these things*, and to pursue righteousness.

2. Read **1 Timothy 6:17-19**

- a. We don't consider ourselves rich; but compared to most of the world we are.
- b. We have comfortable lives, materially. Plenty to eat, drink, comfortable places to live. We are much better off than most of the world; sometimes can only realize that when we travel to other places.
- c. The rich need a warning!
 - i. Trust in God, not your wealth
 - ii. Strive to be rich in good works and generosity, not in bank balance.

- iii. Lay up a great treasure in heaven, not on earth.
- d. But who are “the rich”?
 - i. Most Americans I know, if I asked them “Are you rich?” would answer, “Oh, no; not me!” They would immediately think of someone who had a lot more money than they do. compare themselves to that other “rich” person, and then reassure themselves that they certainly are *NOT* rich.
 - 1. Clearly, the term “rich” is relative. Rich compared to whom? We can always find someone richer than we are.
 - 2. However, most middle-class Americans are indeed very rich by the standards of the rest of the world. We have more than enough to meet all our basic needs.
 - 3. Most people in the world wish they could trade places with us (materially, at least). We live in a “bubble” of wealth, largely isolated from the poverty facing most of the world.
 - 4. Therefore, we need to take these words of Paul, commands to the rich, and apply them to ourselves!
 - e. Clement of Alexandria, a teacher of the church in Alexandria, Egypt, writing c. 195 AD, commented on this passage from **1 Timothy 6**. He has some great insights on the attitude Christians should have toward wealth.
 - i. “Wealth, when not properly governed, is a stronghold of evil, about which many casting their eyes, they will never reach the kingdom of heaven, sick for the things of the world, and living proudly through luxury.
 - ii. “But those who are in earnest about salvation must settle this beforehand in their mind, ‘that all that we possess is given to us for use, and use for sufficiency, which one may attain to by a few things.’ For silly are they who, from greed, take delight in what they have hoarded up.
 - iii. “...But now love of money is found to be the stronghold of evil, which the apostle says, ‘is the root of all evils, which, while some coveted, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (**1 Timothy 6:10**).’
 - iv. “But the best riches is poverty of desires; and the true magnanimity is not to be proud of wealth, but to despise it.

Boasting about one's plate is utterly base. For it is plainly wrong to care much about what anyone who likes may buy from the market. But wisdom is not bought with coin of earth, nor is it sold in the marketplace, but in heaven. And it is sold for true coin, the immortal Word, the regal gold."

- v. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, book 2, chapter 3; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 248)
 - 1. Note that Clement says we do need to *strive to be rich*, but not in the wealth of this world.
 - 2. What is the big deal about having an expensive plate (or for us, perhaps expensive car, or other possession or even vacation or mansion) that *anyone* can purchase at a showroom or even online?
 - 3. *True riches* are found in wanting very little, in being content with the basics.
 - 4. True riches are found in the wisdom that comes from the Word of God. This cannot be purchased in the marketplace; but comes only from heaven and is sold for the true royal gold coin, the Word of God!
- 3. In speaking about Christian widows (now single again) who were living for pleasure, Paul wrote: "She who lives in pleasure is *dead while she lives*." (**1 Timothy 5:6**) This is in sharp contrast to those women who lived lives devoted to prayer, doing good and serving the needs of others.
 - a. The picture of Christians who are living for pleasure: the walking dead; like zombies.
 - b. Many churches are like *Night of the Living Dead*: dead people walking around, everywhere! And people are acting like this is normal?
- e. Other New Testament writers say the same thing (don't love the world), in different words.
 - i. Read **James 4:1-4**
 - 1. Strife in the church was being caused by the desires for pleasure that the Christians had.
 - 2. Their prayers were not answered, because they were praying for things they desired for their own personal pleasure.

- a. Recall that Jesus told us to pray, “Give us today our daily bread”, and “*Your will be done* on earth as it is in heaven”. (**Matthew 6:9-13**)
 - b. We have no business asking God to meet our own personal pleasures. Just ask Him to meet our basic needs in this life.
3. He calls Christians who are living for pleasure (and even praying for more) “adulterers and adulteresses”.
 4. Rhetorical question (very similar to what John says in **1 John**): “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity (hatred) toward God?”
 - a. James further explains: *Anyone* who “wants to be a friend of the world makes himself *an enemy of God*”.
 5. **Question:** Is pleasure all bad, then? What should the attitude of a Christian be, regarding pleasure?
 6. Clement of Alexandria had some significant things to say regarding the Christian’s attitude toward pleasure, in sharp contrast to what Greek philosophers like Epicurus taught. (Note that most people today are practically following the teachings of Epicurus, who taught that maximizing pleasure was the chief aim of life; this is where our word “epicurean” comes from.) Clement wrote:
 - a. “For the feeling of pleasure is not at all a necessity, but the accompaniment of certain natural needs—hunger, thirst, cold, marriage. If, then, it were possible to drink without it, or take food, or beget children, no other need of it could be shown.
 - b. “For pleasure is neither a function, nor a state, nor any part of us; but has been *introduced into life as an auxiliary*, as they say salt was to season food. But when it casts off restraint and rules the house, it generates first sinful lust, which is an irrational desire and impulse towards that which gratifies it; and it induced Epicurus to lay down pleasure as the aim of the philosopher.”
 - c. “...For peace and freedom are not otherwise won than by ceaseless and unyielding struggles with our lusts. For these stout and Olympic antagonists are keener than wasps, so to speak; and Pleasure especially, not by day only, but by night, is in dreams with witchcraft ensnaringly plotting and biting.”
 - d. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, or *Miscellanies*, book 2, chapter 20; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 373)

- i. Pleasure was created (by God) for a purpose, as an auxiliary to go along with important things in life, for our benefit (to encourage eating, drinking, staying warm in the winter, procreating, etc.).
 - ii. It is like salt to season food (use sparingly; if you pour on the salt without restraint, you will *ruin* your meal).
 - iii. If 'pleasure' throws off restraint and tries to "rule the house", it will lead us into all kinds of sin, and ultimately will destroy us.
 - iv. Foolish people (like Epicurus) have tried to elevate pleasure (and maximizing it) to the chief aim of life.
 - 1. And that is how most atheists and even professing Christians live their lives, today!
 - v. The battle: self-control, to keep our lusts in check. Don't allow the desire for pleasure to take over.
 - vi. Our pleasures can *enslave* us. *True freedom* comes from struggling with and overcoming the desires of our flesh.
 - vii. Clement saw the lusts of our flesh as formidable Olympic-level opponents; like biting wasps out to defeat and destroy us.
- ii. Read **1 Peter 2:9-12**.
- 1. See ourselves as sojourners and pilgrims. We are strangers here, just passing through. This world is not our home.
 - 2. Peter recalls the language of **Exodus 19**, where God is describing at Mount Sinai how he set apart the Jewish nation to be His own, distinctive people.
 - 3. When they came to the Promised Land, God's people were told not to intermarry with the Canaanites, not to pick up their customs and practices (**Deuteronomy 7**). They were to be God's own possession; a nation different from all the others, set apart for God.
 - 4. This is the image Peter presents us for what the church is called to be: set apart, distinct from the world.

III. How Do We Put This into Practice?

- a. Paul warned Timothy that in the future, that this would fail in the future, the church would suffer from people who were religious, having a form of godliness, yet who were lovers of money and pleasure. Read **2 Timothy 3:1-5**.

- b. So, we shouldn't be surprised when we see these things in the churches around us. We were warned that these things would happen!
- c. **Question:** What do we do, to keep from falling into this trap that has ensnared so many (loving pleasure and loving the world)?
- d. Some try to prevent drifting into worldliness by coming up with *man-made rules*, to regulate (and put limits on) certain outward behaviors.
 - i. For example: can't have a television, upper limit on cost of a car, restrictions on internet use, certain types of clothing, certain colors, etc.
 - ii. Rules may cause things to look good externally, but problem (*loving* the world and thing of the world) is in the *heart*.
 - 1. Rules may control outward behavior, but they do not change the heart!
 - 2. Clement of Alexandria makes the point that "the poor in spirit" (**Matthew 5:3**) are those whose *hearts are not attached to wealth*. A man can be materially poor, yet his heart still can be consumed with lust for the things of this world. He noted that some even had given up wealth and been worse off, since they regretted it later. These had never given up the *desire in their hearts* for wealth. (Clement of Alexandria, chapters 12-20; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 2, p. 594-596)
 - 3. Man-made rules, based on things we can see and measure outwardly, often give a false sense of security that we have conquered the problem (when in reality our hearts are still consumed with things of the world).
 - iii. Some things that we have to deal with, in terms of "not loving the world" that are current challenges to many of us include:
 - 1. What we do with various holidays (Christmas, for example)
 - 2. Clothing
 - 3. Cars we drive
 - 4. Homes we purchase and live in
 - 5. How we spend our time and money
 - 6. The kind of education we pursue
 - 7. (The list goes on...)
 - iv. Trying to manage all these things with rules is impossible.

1. Rules don't address the real problem: our hearts.
 2. There are way too many things to cover.
 3. Attempting to come up with "one-size-fits-all" man-made rules will end up pushing out some good-hearted people, true Christians who don't happen to fall in line with all our rules.
 4. **Question:** If man-made rules were the answer, why don't we see that approach discussed in Scripture?
- e. Instead of rules to follow, I prefer to focus on *Scriptural principles* that address the heart, and to look to *heroic examples worthy of imitation*. They call me ever higher. In this area (not loving the world), two great examples from the Old Testament come to mind: Job and Moses.
- i. **Job 31:1-28** – Job, who in **James 5** is held up as an example for Christians to follow
 1. Job was generous with his wealth, giving to those in need.
 2. He was righteous and self-controlled, keeping his eyes and heart in check and not pursuing lust and pleasure.
 3. He is a wonderful example of a man who was in the world but not of it, who clearly did not love the world nor the things in it.
 - ii. **Hebrews 11:24-25** – Moses, held up as an example for Christians to follow: one who *lived by faith*.
 1. Moses preferred to be an outcast, rather than hold onto his prestigious position as a prince in Egypt, the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter.
 2. He chose to suffer with God's people, *rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin*, because he was looking forward to a greater reward.
 3. He was motivated to persevere by "seeing" (figuratively speaking) *Him who is invisible*.
 4. I want to have this kind of heart in my own life!
 - iii. I find it helpful to focus first on having the same *heart and attitude* as these heroic men. After attaining this, I will be in a much better position to sort through the details on *specific issues* dealing with the things of this world.

IV. A Closing Image – From Clement of Alexandria

- a. Clement, in appealing to the pagans of his day, points them to a famous story from Homer's epic, *The Odyssey*, which is about the voyage of Odysseus (a.k.a. Ulysses). This is one of the most famous stories of all time, one that includes many memorable episodes. Clement draws on this well-known story to create a compelling and memorable picture of the battle Christians face in this world.
- b. First, a summary of the story of Ulysses and the Sirens, which is found in Homer's *Odyssey*, book 12 (also recounted in *Classic Myths to Read Aloud* by W.F. Russell, pp. 208-210, excerpts from which I read in the audio).
 - i. Ulysses and his men are on a voyage.
 - ii. They had been warned beforehand that they would have to pass by a beautiful, flower-covered island inhabited by Sirens: beautiful mermaids who lured sailors into their island by singing sweet, enticing songs that promised the sailors whatever they most wanted in life.
 1. However, whenever unsuspecting sailors were lured close to the island, the Sirens would tear them to pieces and feed on their flesh.
 2. The beautiful flowers on the island covered the bones of all the men who had been victims.
 3. The enticing songs were so sweet and alluring that no man was able to resist them.
 - iii. As their ship saw the island of the Sirens in the distance, Ulysses took a mass of wax and had each of the men on his ship make ear plugs for himself, so he would not be able to hear the song of the Sirens.
 - iv. However, Ulysses wanted to hear the song for himself. So, he had himself tied to the mast of the ship (without earplugs) and instructed his men not to loosen him (regardless of any pleadings on his part) until after their ship was safely well past the island.
 - v. As they passed the island, Ulysses heard the beautiful seductive songs of the Sirens. He pleaded for the men to loosen him, but to no avail, since they could not hear him (having their ears plugged with the wax).
 - vi. Only after they had safely passed well beyond the island of the Sirens did the men in the boat remove their ear plugs and untie Ulysses from the mast.
 - vii. As a result of this strategy, Ulysses and all the men with him made it safely past the famous, treacherous island of the Sirens.

- c. Based on knowledge of this famous story, Clement of Alexandria explains the challenges Christians face from pleasures in this world, which try to seduce us and draw us away from God. Clement says that Christians are like mariners guiding the ships of our own lives through storm-tossed, dangerous seas. Clement urges us:
- i. “Let us then avoid custom as we would a dangerous headland, or the threatening Charybdis (*a dangerous whirlpool in the sea that could pull down any ship*), or the mythic Sirens. It chokes man, turns him away from truth, leads him away from life: custom is a snare, a gulf, a pit, a mischievous winnowing fan. Urge the ship beyond that smoke and billow.
 - ii. “Let us shun, fellow-mariners, let us shun this great rolling wave; it vomits forth fire: it is a wicked island, heaped with bones and corpses, and in it sings a fair prostitute, Pleasure, delighting with music for the common ear.
 - iii. “[The sirens of Pleasure cry out, flattering us] ‘Come closer, famous Ulysses, great glory of the Greeks; Moor the ship at our island, that you can hear a diviner voice.’
 - iv. She praises you, O mariner, and calls you illustrious; and the prostitute tries to win to herself the glory of the Greeks. Leave her to prey on the dead; a heavenly spirit comes to your help: pass by Pleasure, she beguiles.
 - v. “Let not a woman with flowing train cheat you of your senses, with her flattering words seeking your hurt.” [possibly from **Proverbs 6**]
 - vi. “Sail past the song; it works death. Exert your will only, and you have overcome ruin; bound to the wood of the cross, you shalt be freed from destruction: the word of God will be your pilot, and the Holy Spirit will bring you to anchor in the haven of heaven. Then shalt you see my God, and be initiated into the sacred mysteries, and come to the fruition of those things which are laid up in heaven reserved for us, which ‘ear has not heard, nor have they entered into the heart of any.’ (**1 Corinthians 2:9**)”
 - vii. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, chapter 12; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 2, p. 205)
 - viii. The points Clement of Alexandria makes for us, using the story of Ulysses and the Sirens as a backdrop:
 1. We are mariners on a dangerous (spiritual) journey.
 2. We must stay far from the beguile of pleasure, as Ulysses had to keep clear of the islands of the Sirens.

3. This will call for more than just our own willpower. We must *lash ourselves to the cross of Christ*, as Ulysses had himself tied to the mast.
4. Then the Word of God and the Spirit will lead us into the safe harbor: heaven.

V. For Further Reading

- a. Clement of Alexandria has some great Scripture-based, practical insights on this subject. A great place to start is *Intimacy with God*, a modern translation of material taken from two works of Clement, available from Scroll Publishing.
- b. More extensive writings by Clement are found in Ante-Nicene Fathers volume 2.