

# Kindled Fire

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## Love Not the World

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### 1 John 2:15-17

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A man once said to D.L. Moody, "Now that I am converted, do I have to give up the world?"

The great evangelist answered, "No, you do not have to give up the world. If you give a good testimony for Christ, the world won't want you around. It will give you up pretty quick."

Moody's quip was pretty good. And there is a lot of truth to it. When you really bring Christ to the fore, you will find yourself losing a lot of friends. But what he says is all in jest. Of course we have to give up the world.

The passage before us makes that very explicit. We see here that it is our duty before God to begin distancing ourselves from the world once we come to Christ.

And I want to talk how we do that today. This passage is here to help us distance ourselves from the world. If we understand this passage well, and if we take into consideration the terminology of the passage, as well as its rational and the ultimatum that it contains, then we will find ourselves well on our way to breaking with the world.

In order to distance ourselves from the world do this we need to first understand the term used here. What in the world does John mean when he says, "do not love the world"?

#### I. We must understand the term

When he uses the term "the world," what exactly is he talking about? Mind you, this is a question that has haunted the church for much of her history. It has been defined differently in different ages. And of course, it has therefore affected the way people have acted. And if you define it incorrectly, then your obedience will be skewed.

For instance, in the early church many people believed the world to be society at large and the things associated with normal everyday life. They believed you had to isolate yourself. So there was a tendency towards what we call asceticism.

Back then many people separated themselves from the world by breaking off all connection with society. This is what gave rise to monasticism. The monks thought that if they left the "secular" world and cut off as much connection with people who were doing common everyday things, then they would be more spiritual.

With time things became more and more pronounced. The "separatedness" became more and more fantastic. It came to the point where some monks built raised platforms in order to escape association with anyone. They wanted to escape society, and what better way to do that than by living by yourself in the clouds.

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The most famous example of this is a guy by the name Simon Stylites. He sat on a raised platform for 37 years and would not allow a woman to come near him—not even his own mother!—for fear of falling prey to the world.

This ascetic lifestyle is not what John has in mind when he talks about the world. John isn't simply talking about people or the general populous. As a matter of fact, I would say that kind of life is sinful. Cutting off contact with society is a violation of the cultural mandate ([Gen 1:28](#)).

So it is not asceticism or the people of the world that he is talking about. Neither is he talking about certain tabooed practices typically associated with fundamentalism.

In fundamentalist churches there are certain practices that usually called call "worldly." There are people who say that you can't play cards or dance because those things are worldly. If a guy's hair is a little too long or a girl's skirt doesn't reach the ankles, then they are being worldly. In other words, don't drink, smoke or chew or run with the girls who do.

Some people go so far as to say that we shouldn't be involved in things like politics or social activities because these are worldly things. Politics is just a diversion from things that are truly spiritual. Politics is too concerned with this world and not the world to come. At least that is the rational.

I understand why people think this way. I hope you do too. There is a legitimate concern for purity that these people have. But this isn't what John has in mind when he talks about worldiness. The things that God has created are not wrong in and of themselves. As Scripture says, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

So do not misunderstand what John is saying here. He is not promoting asceticism or fundamentalism. He does not want us to withdraw from society or from the things that he has created. He's talking about the ungodly systems out there. To talk about the world, as John does here, is to refer to the cultural patterns that are against Christ. It is the common mentality among men that ignores His lordship and his law. It is that lifestyle that seeks to live independently of Christ.

Now this is the way most people live today. This is the way most Christians live. Barna polls tell us that less than 10% of Christians have a basic Christian worldview. The consensus is that Christians think more like unbelieving people than like Christians.

When it comes to things like evolution, feminism, homosexuality, entertainment driven worship, abortion, being relaxed when it comes to doctrinal matters, most people have no clue how these are antithetical to the Christian way of life. That's due to the fact that they are influenced more by Rush Limbaugh or CBS news than the Bible.

Our lives are to be guided by the principle in Proverbs 3, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him." In everything we are to lean on the teaching of Scripture. To do otherwise is to be worldly.

So there it is. That is what is meant by this term. To be worldly is to live by the principles of men rather than the principles of God. It is to follow the rebellion of culture rather than to follow Christ.

That is what we must stand against. That is the kind of thing we are to avoid. To "Love not the world or the things in the world," is to live in reliance upon the Lord and upon his revealed word.

With that in mind, let's consider more of what this passage says. Now that we understand the terminology of this passage, let's understand its rational.

## II. We must understand the rational

This passage contains a very tightly knit logic. Each verse contains a reason why we must distance ourselves from the world. The first reason is found in verse 15. It says we should distance ourselves from the world because it defies the love we have for the Lord.

### A. Defies the love we have for the Lord [15]

It says, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

John wants you to see how antithetical these two things are to each other. You have two choices: You either love the world or you love the Lord. You cannot split your love between them. You cannot share your love or love them equally. It is either one or the other.

This is exactly what Jesus was saying when he talked about riches. He said, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

John's point is very much the same. If you love the instincts and the desires of the world, then you are crowding out the Lord. The two are mutually exclusive and completely antithetical to each other.



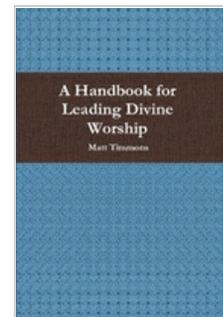
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I want to be very clear on this. This is something that needs to be hammered home with every passing generation. That's because the tendency is to comingle the two. We like to try and coddle both the Lord and the world. And we need to recognize that we cannot. One will always triumph over the other.

We need to distance ourselves from the world because it defies the love we have for the Lord. But it not only defies the love we have for the Lord, it also defies the law we have from the Lord.

### **B. Defies the law we have from the Lord [16]**

Look at verse 16. It says, "*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.*"

That last part is what I'm really focusing you on. All these things are worldly because they are not from the Lord. They do not originate in him and flow from him. They arise out of the cesspool that is the world.

Now, what is from the Lord? Well, it is his law. The law of God comes from God. He delivers it to us in order to shows us the proper way we are to live. But the ways of the world, these are lifestyles that are completely opposed to the way the Lord calls us to live in his law.

John helps us out here by showing us the law of the world. It's the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride in possessions. Lust, greed, pride. All these are the principles of the world.

If you don't believe me, just turn on the television. You will find these great commandments promoted on every channel. Flip on Sports Center and you'll see. Lust, greed, and pride are the basis for virtually every segment.

But that's the way it has been from the beginning. The first sin was based on lust, greed and pride. Eve lusted after the fruit. She was greedy for the knowledge it would bring. She wanted to be like God. She fell from grace because she lived by worldly principles rather than the word of God.

And this is the system that we are called to reject. Since it defies the law of God, we must distance ourselves from it.

But a worldly lifestyle not only defies the love we have for the Lord, and the law we have from the Lord, it also defies the life we have in the Lord.

### **C. Defies the life we have in the Lord [17]**

Look at verse 17. It says, "*The world is passing away [that is to say it is going to end] along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*"

Do you see how fleeting it is? It is evaporating. It is all coming to an end, and one day it will not be around anymore. But those who fear God will find it otherwise. Those who trust in the Lord with all their heart—those of us who fear God and keep his commandments, we have the great promise that we shall live forever.

Young people, I want you to recognize this. The world is passing away. I know that it is alluring. The world will tantalize you and beckon you to come join in. The world will say, "Don't play around with those old fuddy duddy Christians anymore. Come! Come join our merriments and give up those old fashioned ways."

But just remember that it's a short lived thing. The world is passing away and it will be gone in just a matter of time. It will be a faded memory, just like last winter's snow. Only those who hold fast to Christ will have the privilege of enjoying life in the eons ahead.

Now, that is the rational of this passage. John tries to convince us to distance ourselves from the world by giving us these arguments. And they are powerful reasons. The logic that he employs here is sound. But now I want to talk to you about the ultimatum of this verse.

### **III. We must understand the ultimatum**

Let's face it, it doesn't matter how good the logic is. John's argument is air tight. There isn't a word here that is lacking in the least.

But you and I both know that it is going to take more than mere arguments to break our infatuation with the world. Be honest with me. Love isn't always rational, is it? No amount of reasoning will convince a drunk to give up his drink, will it? You can talk to him until he is blue in the face, but he is not going to loosen his grip on that bottle by words alone. His love for alcohol defies logic. The only way you can pry it away from him is if he comes to have a new and greater love grip his heart.

The same is true for you when it comes to the world. Be honest. You don't need to hide it. We all do it. We are all enamored with the world and the things of the world. There is not one of us who is immune from lust, greed, and pride.

No amount of words are going to be able to dislodge it from your heart. Not until you find a greater love to replace it. That's why I say that this passage has an ultimatum.

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In the 19th century there was a man by the name of Thomas Chalmers. He preached a famous sermon on this passage. It was entitled, "The expulsive power of a new affection." His argument went like this: The only way our love for the world can be broken is if we come to have a new affection that is greater.

And he said that this passage ultimately points us to Christ. It is only if we come to see Christ in his redemptive beauty that our love for the world will be overcome.

So I want to point you to Christ. I want your heart to melt at the thought of him and how he has fulfilled this passage on your behalf.

You know, he did what Eve did not do. Eve was filled with lust, greed, and pride. But Christ wasn't when he was tempted in the desert. The devil came to him and said, "Fill your lusts! Turn these rocks into bread." But Christ wouldn't do it.

Then he tempted him with the desires of the eyes. He showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth and said, "I'll give these to you if you just bow down and worship me." But Christ wouldn't do it.

Then he took Jesus up on a high precipice to touch his pride. He said, "Show everyone once and for all who you really are. Prove you are the Son of God! Cast yourself down before all the people. The Scripture says you won't be hurt. God will have to catch you. Do that and everyone will have to confess it."

Each time Christ held fast. He did what you and I cannot. Moreover, he came down from heaven to undergo those pains that are mentioned here in this text. The world is passing away. The curse that God applies to the world was applied to Christ on your behalf. He suffered upon the cross and entered the tomb so that you would not have to—so that you might have the life that is spoken of here.

The ultimatum of this verse is found in Christ the fulfillment of the verse. It is my hope that you will see the great love of Christ for you. And in seeing how great his love is, you will have a greater affection for him. One that will have an expulsive power over your love for the world.

I believe that the old hymn has it right:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in his wonderful face;  
and the things of this world will grow strangely dim,  
in the light of his glory and grace.*

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