

In the 1<sup>st</sup> epistle of John, one of John's main concerns is to teach us how we can know whether we are true believers or not. It is possible to think we are saved when we are not saved. That is a terrible condition to be in. And so John gives a lot of teaching to help us to answer that question. By taking John's teaching seriously it is possible for us to have what we might call a well-founded assurance of our salvation. A mistaken confidence that we are saved, is usually the result of carelessness. It is usually the result of not taking seriously the biblical teaching about how we can know that our faith is real and that we have been born again.

Thankfully being saved and knowing that we are saved, is not some great attainment. We are sinners and unable to save ourselves. Jesus has lived and died and risen again that sinners might trust in him for the forgiveness of their sins and renewal of their lives. We have this beautiful promise in 1 John 1:9 that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Salvation in Christ is accessible. We come to Christ weak and helpless and we are delivered by his grace and mercy.

But salvation involves more than the forgiveness of our sins. It also involves being delivered from the power of sin in our lives. Being forgiven for our sins and being delivered from the power of sin in our lives go together. You cannot have one without the other. If we truly come to Jesus for salvation, the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives giving us the desire and the power to turn from our sins and to begin to keep God's commandments. One of the inevitable results of salvation is that we begin to love God and to love God is to love his commandments and desire to keep them. We will never keep them perfectly in this life, but there will be a beginning of obedience. That is why John writes in 1 John 2:3, "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments." John does not mean that Christians keep God's commandments perfectly, but he does mean that we will be seriously striving for obedience.

It is in this light that we must understand John's teaching that we are going to look at this morning about not loving the world. 1 John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Whatever John means exactly when he says that "the love of the Father is not in him" is it clear that if you love the world you are not saved. Loving the world is incompatible with being a true believer.

So let's work our way through this passage and consider our own lives in the light of it.

So first we have this command. "Do not love the world or the things in the world." Now the term "world" is used in number of different ways in Scripture. In this case it is clear that loving the world or the things of the world is sinful. The world in this sense is the unsaved human race in its rebellion against God with all its attitudes and practices.

In 1 John 5:19 John writes that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Paul in Ephesians 2:1-3 gives a more extended description of the world in the power of the evil one. "And you were dead in the

trespasses and sins, in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” And in Romans 12:2 Paul tells us, “Do not be conformed to this world....”

John is telling us not to love that world and the things of that world. He is telling us not to love the sinful attitudes and practices of the non-Christian people in the midst of whom we live. It is a very broad command. The world lives for the pleasures of this life and not for God. The world may live in gross sins of sexual immorality or crime. But it may also live lives that are more outwardly decent, but without God. People may live for money, or reputation, or sports, or a middle class lifestyle. All such things are worldly if they are a person’s greatest love - if they are what a person lives for. Worldliness can be attitudes and behaviors that are always wrong, or worldliness can be attitudes or behaviors that are not sinful in themselves, but become worldly if they are what we live for – if they are more important than loving and pleasing God.

John is telling us, “Do not love the world or the things of the world.” Do not be greedy. Do not be sexually immoral. Do not be dishonest. Do not be a liar. Do not hate. Do not live godless lives. Do not live for this-worldly pleasure. Do not live for money and the things that money can buy. Do not be unthankful. Do not live apart from God.

John goes on to say, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” John is talking about our love to the Father. He is saying that it is impossible to love the world and the Father at the same time. Jesus makes the same kind of point in Matthew 6:24 when he says, “No man 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 is saying the same thing about the world. You can’t love both the world and the Father. Either you will love the world and hate the Father or you will hate the world and love the Father. You can’t love both.

Now this sounds absolute but we have to understand that John does not mean that you are not a Christian unless you are completely free of any love for the world and you perfectly love the Father with all your heart. If that were the case there would be no Christians. The only person who perfectly did not love the world or the things of the world was Jesus. John has already said that if we claim to be without sins we are liars. There is no person except Jesus who is completely free of the love of the world.

But John is saying something when he says, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Even though Christians are not without sin, there has been a change in them. They have repented of loving the world. They have repented and are repenting of loving the world. They see the world of sin and rebellion against God for what it is and have turned from it. And they love the Father – not perfectly, but really. They express that love in worship and obedience. They understand what it means to live to the glory of God and

they are seeking to do that. Where they see sinful love for worldly pleasures and attitudes they fight against them and instead seek to nurture their love for the Father.

But if there is love for the world and the things of the world without restraint, that is incompatible with love of the Father. What John says here must be taken seriously. “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” If you are living for money or pleasure or comfort and are not seeking to use these sorts of things to the glory of God, “the love of the Father is not in [you].” If you are not fighting against loving the world or the things of the world and motivated by love for the Father to live a life that is pleasing to him, “the love of the Father is not in [you].”

And so we must ask ourselves what it is that we really live for? What is most important to us? What do we think about? How do we spend our time? How do we spend our money? Is there a connection between the enjoyment of the legitimate pleasures of this life and loving God? Are we thankful? Do we make sacrifices in order to serve God and others? Or are we just living in sin without fighting against it? Or are we living for this life without much interest in God and his kingdom and his glory? These are the sorts of questions we need to ask ourselves in the light of what John is saying here in verse 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.”

Now in verse 16, John mentions three things that are in the world. “For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world.” So the world of living apart from God and in rebellion against God – the world we are not to love is characterized by “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life.” The term “desires” is used twice. What we desire is a very important indicator of whether we are saved or not.

Now desires are part of being human. Adam and Eve had desires before they fell into sin. Faithful followers of God have desires. The saints in heaven have desires. The difference is in what we desire. Do we desire to please God or do we desire only to please ourselves? In Luke 22:15 Jesus said to his disciples, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” In Philippians 1:23 Paul wrote, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” Holiness and godliness are expressed in desires.

But the Greek word that is here translated desires can also refer to “an inordinate, self-indulgent craving (that displaces proper affections for God).” And that is how John is using it here. He is saying that the world – that is, the world of opposition to God – is characterized by “inordinate, self-indulgent craving” of the flesh. And the term flesh means sinful nature. The phrase “desires of the flesh” means sinful desires – the desires of the sinful nature. It can also be translated as the lusts of the sinful nature.

This is what characterizes the world – the human race in opposition to God. The lusts of the sinful nature. In Galatians 5:15 Paul gives a list of “the works of the flesh.” “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions,

divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like these.” These are the sorts of things that John is talking about when he uses the phrase, “desires of the flesh” to help us to understand what characterizes the world. “The desires of the flesh [are] not from the Father but [are] from the world.”

The “desires of the flesh” are what characterizes the world. But they are remain a temptation for believers. We are not free from sinful desires. John is not mentioning them here as something that is just a curiosity for his readers. He is not saying to his readers – “Oh look out there in the world at all these people who are characterized by sinful lusts. Aren’t you glad that sinful lust are no longer a temptation for you?” He is warning his readers against sinful lusts because they are a temptation for us. Is there no temptation for sexual immorality? Is there no temptation for idolatry – that is loving anything more than God? Is there no temptation for sensuality – for self-indulgence? – for living for pleasure rather than living for God? Or for rivalries, dissensions, divisions?

In Galatians 5:17 Paul writes, “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” Fighting against the desires of the flesh is part of what characterizes the lives of believers. That is why John exhorts us, “Do not love the world or the things in the world.” This is something he needs to say because it is something that we need to hear.

He also speaks of “the desires of the eyes” as describing the world. The desires of the flesh focus on the temptations that come from within – our sinful nature. The desires of the eyes focuses on the temptations for worldliness that come from what we see with our eyes. There are lots of things available for us to see that tempt us towards worldliness. That was true in John’s day in which there was a lot less for people to see. But they could see how the people of the world lived. They could see self-indulgence. They could look at a member of the opposite sex in a lustful way. They could see how some around them became rich by dishonest business practices. There was plenty for them to see with their eyes that tempted them to worldliness which is why John warns them about the desires of the eyes.

But in our time that is much more of an issue and a temptation. We are bombarded with images on our devices and on signs and billboards. And much of that is designed to influence us in the ways of the world. We must be very careful about what we allow ourselves to watch and to read and to see. We can’t control everything that we see as we move around in this world, but we can control a great deal of what we expose ourselves to. John is warning us about the “desires of our eyes” as part of his exhortation for us not to love the world.

Jesus highlights how serious this is when he says in Matthew 5:29 “If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.”

The third characteristic of the world that John mentions is “the pride of life.” A footnote give an alternate translation – pride of possessions. This is the preferable translation because in 3:17 uses the same word in a way that clearly means possessions. 3:17 says, “But if anyone has the world’s goods and see his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”

So the world is characterized by pride of possessions. To belong to the world which is human beings in rebellion against God is to be proud by definition. Refusing to worship and serve God is proud rebellion, but it is also involves the claim not to need God – to be able to live independently of God. And from there it moves to taking credit in any achievements. Worldly people are proud of many things – whatever level of wealth they have gathered – whatever education they have achieved – whatever status they have in society – whatever skills they have – how famous they are.

And that is a temptation for believers as well. John is mentioning this to believers as part of his exhortation not to love the world. By that he also means to take pride in the successes or gifts that God has given you. As Paul puts it in Philippians 2:3, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” The exhortation not to love the world includes a warning against pride. One of the characteristics of the world is pride of possessions and one of the characteristics that Christians are to nurture is humility. We are completely dependent upon God and any achievements, any abilities all come from God. Paul teaches this in 1 Corinthians 4:6-7 where he tells the Corinthians not to “be puffed up in favor of one another. For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then your received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”

So the “desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life” – these characterize the world and Christians are not to love the world. John says that these things are “not from the Father but from the world.” God the Father is not the source of the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life – the world is. These things come from the world which is against God.

John’s point is that there is a fundamental incompatibility between the Father and the world and that means that there is a fundamental incompatibility between loving the world and loving the Father. The two objects of love are total opposites of one another. If we love the Father we can’t love the world and if we love the world we can’t love the Father. You can’t love holiness and sin at the same time. You can’t love obedience and disobedience at the same time. In chapter 1:5-6, John wrote, “God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”

In 2:4 he writes, “Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.”

So the big question for us from this passage is - do we love the Father or do we love the world? The Father is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Light is holiness. Light is purity. Light is loving. The world is darkness. The

world is sinful. The world is lustful. The world is self-indulgent and proud. Do we love the Father or do we love the world? God's law reflects God's character. Do we love God's law? It's impossible to love the Father and not love his law. In Romans 7 Paul speaks about his struggle with sin. He could not do the good he wanted to do and did the evil that he did not want to do. But he knew what he wanted. He knew what was attractive to him. He said in Romans 7:22, "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being." That is the same as loving the Father in his inner being because the law is the reflection of who God is.

So there is the Father on one side and the world on the other. Do you delight in the Father or do you delight in the world? That is the question that this passage asks of us. It does not teach that we can ever love the Father so perfectly in this life that the world is no longer a temptation. The exhortation "Do not love the world or the things of the world" is given exactly because the world and the things of the world are a temptation. And yet we can know what we love. We can know whether our ultimate love is of the Father or of the world.

Verse 17 gives a strong encouragement not to love the world. "And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

The "world is passing away along with its desires." There is an attraction for the world in all who are not yet perfected – which is all of us in this life. Hebrews 11:25 uses the phrase the "fleeting pleasures of sin." Sin is pleasurable. But the pleasures of sin are fleeting. They do not last even in this life because they do not truly satisfy, but for sure they only last as long as life on earth. The only "forever" associated with sin is eternal pain and suffering. But eternal life comes with doing the will of God. Doing the will of God does not earn eternal life, it is the result of eternal life.

Jesus said in John 6:27, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life." That is the Christian hope which is for those who do not love the world or the things of the world, but who love the Father and do the will of God – eternal life. Eternal life is the great promise to those who believe in Jesus. They shall not perish but have eternal life. Life is precious. Eternal life is much more precious – not only because it is eternal, but also because it is life with God.

This passage was written to help us discern whether we have eternal life. In 1 John 5:13, John writes, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." That includes the text that we have considered this morning. By considering what it means to love the world and what it means to love God we can discern whether we have eternal life. Do we love the Father or do we love the world?

But when we consider that question, we will find we are attracted to the world more than we should be and that our love for the Father is less than it should be. Our love for the Father will never be perfect in this life and that means our hope for eternal life will always be based on Jesus and what he has done in our place. In the first two verses of chapter 2 John has written, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that

you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins and not for our only but also for the sins of the world.”

The work of God in us is a confirmation that our faith is real, but in this life it will never be perfect. It is always the evidence of salvation, never the basis for our salvation. The basis of our salvation is Jesus’ righteousness. He lived the perfect life. He died to pay the penalty for our sins. And what he did is perfect – completely acceptable and pleasing to God. And that is the basis for the confidence that we have eternal life.