

‘Living in the Light’

A teaching series in 1 John by Rev. Robert Griffith

Part 8: Fatal Attraction

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.” (1 John 2:15-17)

Some time ago a book was written on church life called, ‘The Frog In The Kettle.’ It was an interesting title designed to call to mind how it is so easy to gradually drift into error and trouble. Perhaps you could subtitle the book as ‘How To Boil A Frog.’ The title is based on the theory that if you want to boil a frog you don’t put it in a pot of boiling water. If you drop the frog into boiling water, it will jump out immediately. So you need to put the frog in a pot of cold water where it is perfectly comfortable. Then you put the pot on the stove, and little by little the water gets warm. It’s very pleasant at first. By the time it gets a little warmer, the frog is swimming around like it’s in a frog Jacuzzi. But finally, when it’s boiling, it’s too late. That’s how you boil a frog.

Of course, it’s only an illustration and it’s actually not true. Most frogs will jump out when it get’s hot and not be fooled. Not so with humans. We are not as smart as frogs and this parable is told to give us insight into how we human adapt to and then adopt a sinful lifestyle. We don’t dive right in. We slowly wade in. We start at the shallow end of the pool. And slowly we find ourselves getting in deeper and deeper without noticing. It is so slow that we hardly realize it, until it is too late. This is true for churches as well. We slowly find ourselves accommodating the world without realizing how much we are becoming like the world. Finally, someone wakes up and notices what is happening and sound the alarm. The call goes out to turn from our wicked ways.

Often, however, the call to turn from the world and its values has been anything but a clear, biblical call. Often worldliness is defined in an unbiblical way. Worldliness was once defined as going to a dance or going to the movies. It may be defined as becoming involved in politics or sending your children to a public school where heathens will teach them. All sorts of things have been defined as worldliness by Christians at one time or another. The problem has been that too many of these definitions have either gone too far off course or not gone far enough in speaking the truth. The biblical definition of worldliness may surprise you. But that is where we must go to find a true definition of worldliness. You see, it is possible to avoid certain kinds of behaviour and be more worldly than if we engaged in it.

So what is worldliness? Well, when we think of the world, we think of the earth and the created order. The word for this in Greek is *cosmos*. When God created the world he brought order out of chaos. But the created order is not evil, it is good. God said so after He had finished creating it. Another idea that comes to mind when we think of the world is the people inhabiting our planet. ‘*We Are The World*’ says the popular song. But we are commanded to love people, so people are not the world which John is writing here. In fact, Jesus Christ came for these very people who inhabit the world. He has placed His love upon them and gave His life for them. The world, as John speaks of it, is defined as the way of thinking and living that fails to acknowledge God as central. It is the world system of living without God. It is a philosophy of life and a way of thinking. It is really an attitude of the heart.

We will see more about this in a moment, but first we need to consider an important question. It is the question that God would ask each of us from this passage. Do you love the world and what it offers? As we consider this text, this is the question we must constantly be asking ourselves. If we are honest before God, today's message can make a difference in our lives and in the lives of those with whom we may have influence.

A Fatal Attraction

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father[a] is not in them. For everything in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - comes not from the Father but from the world." (1 John 2:15-16)

Several years ago there was a movie entitled *Fatal Attraction* in which a man finds himself attracted to another woman. He yields to this temptation, no doubt thinking that it will be a brief encounter. Instead, he finds himself trapped in an affair that threatens to destroy his entire life. Why is it that we are attracted to the very things which can destroy us? Is it because we like to take risks? Is it because we like dangerous excitement? Is it because we're just plain stupid? Whatever it is, it is true that we are attracted to things that can destroy us. I suppose that we think that the thrill is worth it. How else can you explain bungee jumping?

Unfortunately, Christians are attracted to the world and worldliness in much the same way. This is why we have this exhortation to not love the world. It is there not to inhibit our adventurous spirit, but to save us from a world of grief. This is a very clear negative warning. Do not love the world or anything in the world. It is in the negative. But I like to call it a positive negative. It is a negative plea which produces a very positive result. It saves us from the devastating consequences of our infatuation with the world.

You see, we are tempted to believe that we can carry on an affair with the world and still follow Jesus. We can love the world and love God too, can't we? Well, the straightforward answer to that question is no! John tells us that love for the world and love for God are mutually exclusive. You cannot truly love both. Jesus said, *"No one can serve two masters."* (Matthew 6:24). Jesus did not say that no one would serve two masters, rather no one could serve two masters. This is not a question of choice, it is a question of possibility. In other words, it is impossible to truly serve two masters – even if it looks like that's what you are doing. John says here, *"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."*

This becomes clearer as we notice how John defines the manifestations of worldly behaviour. John says, in verse 16, *"For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world."* The first manifestation of love for the world is found in the cravings of sinful man. A more literal translation of this phrase is *"the lust of the flesh."* This refers to the way we take good, natural desires to the extreme. It refers to an inordinate affection or desire. It is a lust. It is a craving that drives us to excess. What is being referred to here is how we allow a desire for food, or drink, or sex, or any other legitimate human need to control us. These things become our focus. We become connoisseurs of these pleasures and live for them.

The second area of seduction comes from the lust of the eyes. These are sins of the mind or intellect. The famous pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, said, *"The best way of defining this is to say that it is the kind of man or woman who lives according to false values. They judge by appearances and by outward show."*

He thought the lust of the eyes was what caused us to delight in that which was appealing to the eyes. Vanity, pomp and show, giving an impression, were all part of the lust of the eye. People who are consumed with personal appearance, clothing, and how they look to other people (rather than God) are guilty of this form of worldliness.

The final and perhaps most treacherous form of worldliness is what he calls the boasting of what we have and what we do. A literal translation of this phrase is *"the boastful pride of life."* The reason why this is perhaps the most terrible of all the areas is because it is a sin of the spirit. It is pride. But it is boastful pride. It is self-glorification generally at the expense of others. It is that feeling that somehow you are just a little better than other people.

There are many things that we can boast about. It can be pride of birth. You may have a certain name or heritage. There may be blood in your veins that gives you a certain social status. It can be pride in your accomplishments, or your influence, or your acquaintances. It can be pride in your wealth or material possessions. It can be pride in the school you attended and the degrees you possess. It can be pride of your race and ethnic background. But it's all boastful pride.

The problem with this sort of pride is that it corrupts the spirit. It causes you to look down on other people or evaluate them by false standard. This is the sort of thing that God utterly detests. John goes on to say that these things are not from the Father. These things are the essence of worldliness. Worldliness is how we deal with the world. Do we love it or do we love God?

An Eternal Perspective

The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever." (1 John 2:17)

When we allow ourselves to be seduced by the world, we have certainly lost our focus. John reminds us of an eternal perspective when he tells us that the world is temporary and following Christ is eternal. When we pin our hopes on what this world has to offer we are in much the same situation as those passengers aboard the Titanic. We are having a good time now – but the good time will be shorter than we think. *"This ship can't sink,"* they said, but it did. *"This world will never end,"* they say, but it will. John tells us that this world and its desires are passing away. That is one good reason to love God and not the world, for God will never pass away. John also tells us that those who do the will of God will live forever. That's another good reason why we ought to love God and not the world. This is the eternal perspective we must have.

So we come back to the question that we asked at the beginning. Do you love the world and what it offers? Are you spending your time laying up treasure in Heaven or pursuing treasure on earth? Jim Elliott was a missionary who died at the hands of the Auca Indians. He made a statement that I believe sums up John's message very well. Elliott said, *"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."*

Perhaps the best way to combat worldliness is not to merely denounce it. A preacher was asked what his sermon topic was one day and he replied, *"Sin, and why I'm against it!"* I do believe that we need to call sin what it is - but we need to do more than that. The greatest need is to love and follow Jesus. Loving and following Jesus is the greatest way to combat worldliness. When you love Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind and strength there is no room for the world and what it offers. Our hearts and lives are filled with the presence of Christ. So let me ask the question again: Do you love the world and what it offers? Perhaps a better question is: Do you love Jesus with all your heart? By that I mean is Jesus at the centre of your life, your priorities, your relationships, your whole life?