



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

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. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, & the pride in one’s possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever. (1 Jn. 2:15-17)

1. What is the World? ‘World’ is used 6 times in 1 Jn. 2:15-17. What is the World in Scripture?
 - a. World can mean the earth, the planet (Acts 17:24; Jn. 1:10; 17:5; 1 Jn. 3:17; 4:17)
 - b. World can mean people in general (Jn. 3:16; 12:19; 1 Jn. 2:2; 3:1)
 - c. World can mean the evil, anti-God system of values, priorities & beliefs that people hold that excludes God (Jn. 12:31; 15:19; 1 Jn. 5:19; 2:17)
 - a. *“John’s command not to love the world or the things that belong to the world should **not be seen as a deprecation of the physical world in which we live...Neither was John telling us not to love the people in the world. We clearly know from John 3:16 that God loves the people of the world, & we are to do so as well. Instead John was saying that we are not to place high regard on that which runs counter to God & His ways.**” (Jim Shaddix, *Explore the Bible Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John & Revelation*, p. 32)*
2. John’s First Command: *“Do Not Love the World, Nor the Things of the World”* (1 Jn. 2:15a)
 - a. *“Do not love the world or anything in it.’ **By this the author is surely not commending retreat from everyday life into self-preoccupation. If that were his intent, it would be practically impossible to fulfill the... commandment to love one’s brother or sister.**” (C. Clifton Black, *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. X, p. 824)*
 - b. Do not love
 - a. *“**The present form of the imperative is used in the prohibition, ‘do not love’,...The love involved in this exhortation carries a different meaning from the love (of fellow believers) mentioned in 2:10. [L]ove...here...is focussed on the pleasure & gratification one hopes to receive.**” (Colin Kruse, *Pillar Commentary: The Letters of John*, p. 82)*
 - b. *“Clearly ‘love’ for the world is of a qualitatively different kind than the love one is to have for a brother or sister, which is an expression of care & concern. **Here, ‘love’ refers to an attraction to something that one wishes to enjoy, an indulgence in things that are not in the light. It is to want to participate in what is set in rebellion against God.**” (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1, 2, 3, John*, p. 138)*

- c. The World: The evil, anti-God system of values, priorities & beliefs (1 Jn. 5:19)
- “By setting in mutual opposition ‘love for the world’ & ‘the love of the Father,’ 1 John recalls the Gospel’s view of the world as, at [the same time], **the theater of God salvation** (Jn. 3:16-17) & **a deluded realm that is enslaved in wickedness** (Jn. 12:31) **as well as radically opposed to Christ**, the world’s illuminator, judge, & redeemer (Jn. 7:7; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46-48).” (C. Clifton Black, *Op Cit*, p. 824)
 - “**There can be no doubt that in the present context [‘world’] means ‘worldly attitudes or values that are opposed to God’.** The difference between ‘the world’ & ‘the things in the world’ is the difference between the world thought of as a whole & the constituent elements which make it up. What constitutes ‘the world’ in this context is clarified in 2:16.” (Colin Kruse, *Op Cit*, p. 82)
 - “...‘**the world’...the comprehensive sphere of human life that is under the control of the evil one...**” (Karen Jobes, *Op Cit*, p. 139)
- d. Not deriving our identity from the world
- “...[N]either Jesus nor his disciples are ‘of’ the world in the sense of belonging to it or deriving from it their **identity or existence** (Jn. 8:23; 15:19; 17:14, 16). **In Johannine perspective, to love the world is to embrace an illusion that has rejected Christ &, therefore, to show oneself hostile to God.**” (C. Clifton Black, *Op Cit*, pp. 824-5)
3. Loving the Father, Or Loving the World (1 Jn. 2:15b)
- “**[L]ove for the world as John defines it is mutually exclusive with love for the Father.**” (Karen Jobes, *Op Cit*, p. 138)
- Love for the Father is our top priority
 - “**We cannot love both the Father & the world at the same time, so placing the highest regard on worldly things means we are not placing the highest regard on God.** Jesus made the same point in connection with money: ‘No one can be a slave of two masters, since either he will hate one & love the other, or be devoted to one & despise the other. You cannot be slaves of God & of money’ (Matt. 6:24).” (Jim Shaddix, *Op Cit*, pp. 32-3)
 - “The ‘love of the Father’ (2:15) may mean ‘the Father’s love’ (subjective genitive) or [our] ‘love for the Father’ (objective genitive)...The parallel with loving the world [clearly our ‘love for the world’] makes the latter [i.e., our ‘love for the Father,’] slightly more natural.” (David Rensberger, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 73)
 - “**‘The love of the Father’ means the believers’ love for the Father, because it stands in opposition to believers’ love for the world. What the whole conditional sentence conveys, then, is that if people love the ‘world’, they do not love the Father.**” (Colin Kruse, *Op Cit*, p. 83)
 - Not loving the world
 - “**‘If anyone loves the world’...in a word,...means to be taken up with all that is in the world (as defined in 2:16) instead of seeking to do the will of God.**” (Colin Kruse, *Op Cit*, p. 82)
4. What Makes Up the Evil, Anti-God World? (1 Jn. 2:16)
- “**‘Everything in the world’ does not refer to its physical makeup, such as seas & mountains & animals, but to the moral & spiritual impulses that determine how people live.**” (Karen Jobes, *Op Cit*, pp. 139-40)
 - “Having described the constituent elements that make up the world, the author reminds his readers that **everything in the world comes not from the Father but from the world...the attitudes & values which are defined in 2:16, are ‘not from God’.** Clearly then, as the author says in 2:15b, ‘if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him’. This is more than enough reason for any believer not to love the world. However, there is another reason why believers should not love the world, & this is spelled out in the next verse.” (Colin Kruse, *Op Cit*, p. 84)
 - “The list of three negative qualities that specify ‘everything in the world’ follows the convention of using the number three for referring to evil in the ancient world. Philo, for instance, attributes all wars to ‘the desire for money, or glory, or pleasure.’ This argues against seeing subordination of the second two to the first or reading them as entirely independent qualities...**It is meant to refer not to three randomly chosen evils, but to the source of all the evil in the world’s way of life...**” (Karen Jobes, *Op Cit*, p. 141)
- d. The lust of the flesh
- “**[The lust of the flesh]** (lit. ‘the desire of the flesh’). The word ‘desire’ is found 38 times in the NT. In only three places does it have positive connotations (Lk. 22:15; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess 2:17); in all the rest it has morally negative connotations, as it does in the present context...**This is a general category, & the second & third elements of those things which comprise the world are subcategories.**” (Colin Kruse, *Op Cit*, p. 83)
 - “The Greek word translated **flesh can refer to the material that covers the bones of humans & animals or to the physical body as a whole.** The combination of **flesh with lust gives the phrase a decidedly negative sense.** With this phrase John indicated **any type of sinful interests or desires that lead believers away from fellowship with God.**” (Jim Shaddix, *Op Cit*, p. 33)

- c. “These verses underscore the kind of distance that, in the elder’s opinion, should exist between the believer & the world. **From the world there bubbles up a boiling desire for things ‘of the flesh.’**” (C. Clifton Black, *Op Cit*, p. 825)
- d. “**‘Flesh’...refers...to the entire domain of humanity, which is distinct from God...The Elder is not counseling rejection of material experience...or an ascetic denial of normal appetites. What he rejects is an absorption with things ‘of the flesh’ & visible ‘to the eyes’...What he repudiates are lust & boastful presumption – impulsive, self-aggrandizing desire for this world’s ephemeral allurements that would unseat God as the sovereign center of one’s existence.** Such cravings are as ridiculous as they are wrong headed, for their object, this world, is passing away. Only the fulfillment of God’s will is eternally enduring.” (C. Clifton Black, *Op Cit*, p. 825)
- e. “**‘The desire of the flesh’...is the impulse of human behavior that arises from the natural, even God-given, physical needs...In John’s writings, ‘flesh’ is that which is merely human as opposed to divine (John 3:6; 6:63; 8:15)...[I]n John the concept of ‘flesh’ does not denote innate sinfulness...The desires of the flesh may be natural, but our fallen nature drives people to satisfy them in ways that are not of God, leading to things like gluttony, alcoholism, & sexual immorality...[I]t is shortsighted to allow one’s physical needs to become the driving force in life...**” (Karen Jobes, *Op Cit*, p. 140)
- e. The lust of the eyes
- a. “The second phrase relates **lust** to eyesight. While **lust is obviously not limited to what we physically see, what we physically see can often lead us into sinful desire.**” (Jim Shaddix, *Op Cit*, p. 33)
- b. “The Johannine concern for the world is not usually so specific in cataloging the temptations that the world holds... **The eyes...when...motivated by desire,...are directed away from God.** They focus entirely on life here & now, as opposed to being born from above & born from God (John 1:13; 1 John 4:7).” (George L. Parsenius, *Paideia, Commentaries on the New Testament: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 82)
- c. “Given the context of the world’s temporary status (v. 17), [it] is probably right [to say] that **this phrase refers to the shortsighted desire for only what the eyes see physically.**” (Karen Jobes, *Op Cit*, p. 140)
- f. The pride in one’s possessions
- a. “More difficult to translate is the phrase rendered ‘pride in earthly life,’ which in Greek is *alazoneia biou*. The first noun, *alazoneia*, has a wide range of meaning that covers the concepts of **boastfulness, pride, & arrogance.**” (George L. Parsenius, *Op Cit*, p. 82)
- b. “The word ‘bios’ has a range of meanings, including ‘life’, ‘livelihood’, ‘living’, ‘property’, & ‘possessions’. It is used in 3:17 clearly with the sense of property or possessions, & this is the predominant use of the word in the NT. To construe it here, then, as ‘possessions’...not only makes good sense but is also in line with the only other use of the word in 1 John (see 3:17) & the predominant use in the NT.” (Colin Kruse, *Op Cit*, p. 83)
- c. “In the third phrase [‘pride in one’s possessions’] John combined the word for arrogance with a Greek word that can refer to the means of living or sustenance—the things needed to maintain physical life...‘pride in one’s possessions gets at the root issue of the phrase. **Arrogance in our own position & power can lead us to rely on ourselves rather than on God.** These three phrases combine to paint a picture of everything that belongs to the world as those things that cause us to focus on physical desires rather than on God’s will in our lives. Such values are foolish.” (Jim Shaddix, *Op Cit*, p. 33)
- d. “**When God is factored out of our life’s equation or relegated to the extraneous role of a cosmic coach, our identity becomes confused. We become what we do & how much we earn. We become the clothes we wear & the baubles we buy. We become the neighborhoods we live in, the schools our children attend, & the clubs we belong to. But an identity constructed from our ravenous cravings for the transitory is hopelessly unstable & doomed to disappointment. ‘You can in no manner be satisfied with temporary goods for you were not created to find your rest in them.’ (Thomas à Kempis).**” (C. Clifton Black, *Op Cit*, p. 825)
- e. “The Greek word translated ‘pride’ is in the semantic domain of **pride, arrogance, & boastfulness**, & is often used in contexts that express overconfidence in one’s own resources & wealth (2 Macc 9:8; 15:6; 4 Macc 8:19; Wisd 5:8; 17:7)...John is...pointing to those whose security in their worldly things & wealth makes them so prideful as to overlook their need for & dependence on God (Prov 18:11; 30:8). They do not realize that all they have that is not of God will pass away & be of no eternal value.” (Karen Jobes, *Op Cit*, p. 141)
- g. These are not from the Father
- a. “John ended...verse [16] with the reason we should not place priority on worldly things—their origin is from the world & not from the Father. Only One is worthy of our ultimate loyalty & love. **Putting primary focus on the things of this world interferes with our worship of the Father.**” (Jim Shaddix, *Op Cit*, p. 33)
- b. “**To what do we ultimately entrust ourselves? To this world’s bogus promises of salvation by beauty, financial security, & creature comfort? Or to God’s guarantee of our full restoration through the love of Jesus Christ?**” (C. Clifton Black, *Op Cit*, p. 826)
5. The World or God’s Will? (1 Jn. 2:17)

- a. **“John referred to the ultimate fate of this world & the things of the world to remind his readers that basing their lives on material things or on that which runs counter to God’s will & purpose can only lead ultimately to disappointment & destruction.”** (Jim Shaddix, *Op Cit*, p. 34)
- b. **“[T]he world & all that it desires – food, drink, sex, money, the things always before our eyes, & its overweening pride that rejects any need for God – all of that is passing away. Even the most permanent things of this life that are not of God have no eternal value.”** (Karen Jobes, *Op Cit*, p. 143)
- c. The world is passing away
- a. **“The other reason why believers should not love the world is that the world & its desires pass away. Using a present tense form of the verb ‘to pass away’, the author depicts the world’s passing as an ongoing process. Already in 2:8 he has spoken in a similar vein about the darkness passing away because the true light of Jesus Christ is already shining, & that provides the clue to the meaning here. Because of all that has been set in motion by God through the coming of Jesus Christ, the world is passing away & its days are numbered (1 Cor 7:31). All that is antithetical to God & his grace is passing away; it is doomed. There is no future in worldliness.”** (Colin Kruse, *Op Cit*, p. 84)
- b. **“Its appearance of permanence is deceptive. History is not an endless cycle but is speeding toward a conclusion willed by God.”** (ESV Study Bible)
- d. Those who do the will of God remain forever
- a. **“Doing God’s will demonstrates that an individual is part of God’s family (Mk. 3:35).”** (Jim Shaddix, *Op Cit*, p. 34)
- b. **“What the author means by doing ‘the will of God’ in this context...is the opposite to all that is involved in loving the world...avoiding the ‘lust of the eyes’ & ‘pride in possessions’. Looking beyond the immediate context, doing the will of God in 1 John involves believing in his Son & loving fellow believers (3:23).”** (Colin Kruse, *Op Cit*, p. 84)
- c. **“Probably the best explanation of what it means to ‘remain forever’ is to be found in the teaching of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. Again & again Jesus stresses that those who believe in him (sometimes expressed in terms of eating the bread he gives, or keeping his word, or hearing his voice) shall never perish but shall live & remain forever (6:51, 58; 8:51; 10:28; 11:26).”** (Colin Kruse, *Op Cit*, p. 84)
6. Gender Roles: Not Adopting 1st Century Norms in the 21st Century (1 Tim. 2:8-15)
- a. Adopting the norms of 1st century society today
- a. **“It seems clear that the Pastor [1 Tim. author] adopts the attitude of society with regard to the role of women in the household & society...He adopts the societal role assigned to women by society of wife & mother & thus reflects the values of society around him. For clearly the [1st-Century] society followed hierarchical & patriarchal norms...We also note that instructions are only given to the subordinate members of the community (e.g., 1 Tim. 5:14; 6:1-2).”** (Paul Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, p. 367)
- b. **The “desire to avoid negative comment is...connected to the author’s attempt to control the behavior of women so that the Christian community conforms to the ideal of the [1st-Century] household...‘The author is socially conservative, wanting...conformity to an ideal of a hierarchical household that mirrors the public hierarchy established by the Roman Imperial authorities’ (Dewey).”** (Paul Trebilco, *Op Cit*, pp. 517-8)
- c. **“It is clear in a number of passages in the Pastorals that the author wishes women to conform to traditional Greco-Roman roles (1 Tim. 2:15; 5:10, 14; Titus 2:2-5).”** [Paul Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, p. 518 #49]
- d. **“Some of [the women’s] behavior [that’s criticized] can be seen as living out a more egalitarian vision of ‘the faith,’ but for the Pastor [1 Tim.] this behavior involved a disruption of the prescribed social & household norms which led to negative comment from outsiders. It’s clear that the teaching activity & behavior of women is one of the main concerns of the pastor.”** (Paul Trebilco, *Op Cit*, p. 528)
- b. John’s view on gender roles
- a. **“Compared with the importance that the Fourth Gospel ascribes to female characters, the lack of reference to female figures in the [Johannine] Epistles is striking...That the Epistles’ silence implies a denial of women’s presence & importance in the Johannine communities is not an automatic conclusion...It is impossible that the author...of the Johannine Epistles sought to exclude the presence of women in the church entirely. The use of the masculine plural should be interpreted in an inclusive sense to refer also to the women in the church.”** (P-R. Tragan, “Johannine Epistles,” in M. N. Puerto (ed.) *Gospels: Narrative & History*, pp. 246)
- b. **“There is a remarkable lack of hierarchical structures in the Johannine Letters. It is rather the horizontal, family relationships that are highlighted; the author repeatedly addresses the group of believers as a whole as ‘the children,’ ‘beloved,’ or ‘the brothers [& sisters]’ (e.g. 2:1, 7, 12, 14 [etc.]).”** (Mikael Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus*, p. 201)
- c. **“We find differences between 1-2 Timothy & the Johannine Letters...in terms of general social structures. The author of 1-2 Tim. articulates...hierarchical structures & orders in all areas; from the task of the husband as the [overseer] of both the family & the church, & of women [vis-a-viz] ... teaching roles, to the role of widows, the older &**

younger men & women & slaves. **Such social structures are almost totally absent in the Johannine Letters, women & slaves are not mentioned at all &.... The older & younger members of the community ... are addressed by ...ambiguous terms. Once again, [John] does not argue in terms of certain community structures & orders. His vision of the community... seems much more egalitarian...We may suspect that the [Elder] not only presents another way of validating the true tradition, but that [the Elder] does so in deliberate response, or as a reaction, to the routinization of the offices in the hierarchical structures...in the Pauline tradition that belongs to Ephesus.**" (Mikael Tellbe, *Op Cit*, p. 210)

7. Application

a. Turning good things into 'god' things

a. **"The longing of the human heart is to be loved & to love. The objects of our affections need to be rightly ordered if we are truly to find ultimate & lasting satisfaction. John, therefore, commands us, 'Do not love the world or the things that belong to the world.' Why? To love the world is to not love Father God, which is what you really need. It is what you were created for. John says, 'Choose your lover, but choose carefully; choose wisely. Choose God the Father, not the worldly enticements of the father of lies' (John 8:44). We must recognize that turning even good things into 'god' things becomes a bad thing. It is to give your love to a lesser lover – one who can never satisfy, who can never give you what you truly need."** (Daniel Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, 3 John*, p. 51)

b. Questioning the reigning value system of all contemporary life at its roots

a. **Preachers have the reputation of railing against society's evils by identifying specific behaviors that are destructive & sinful — things such as drunkenness, addictions, or sexual immorality. While it is true those behaviors are not of God, John's thinking in this passage strikes at a much deeper level. The three evils he lists are not to be narrowed to three specific vices — as if "the desire of the flesh" was all about illicit sex and pornography — but John insists instead that we question the reigning value system of all of contemporary life at its roots. It is not enough to say that sexual immorality is wrong, or that pride is wrong, or that we must not covet material possessions. While all that is true, they are only symptoms of the much deeper problem of "the world's" alienation from God. All human values, ethics, & morality that are defined by fallen people are fatally flawed because they are built on false premises about reality.**

b. People who reject the knowledge that 'God is light', reject God's sovereign prerogative to define the standard of human values & morality. Even if not an atheist at the philosophical level, anyone who rejects God's rule of life in some aspect of their behavior is to that extent an atheist in practice. The underlying problem is a radical autonomy of the human spirit that insists on being its own god. And the result is each person 'doing what is right in their own eyes' (Judg 21:25) in a world that no longer has a uniform basis for law & morality. That is the way of "the world" as John uses the term.

c. **His first imperative is, therefore, foundational for all others that will follow: do not love the world. Do not adopt the world's attitudes & ways of life with respect to God.** For the attraction to human autonomy is a rejection of &, therefore, a failure to love God. There is no love for God in the one who loves the unbridled desires of the flesh for food, drink, & sex. There is no love for God in one who places the highest value on material things of this life that can be bought & sold but who undervalues the invisible things like love, faithfulness, & goodness. There is no love for God in the one who feels so self-satisfied & secure in the life they have built on their own accomplishments & wealth that they have no need for God.

d. It is only by allowing God to assume his rightful place in our lives as the sovereign Lord that we can rightfully satisfy physical needs, enjoy material blessings, & have true security to live comfortable & tranquil lives. **When John commands us not to love the world or the things in the world, he is speaking of one's most basic life orientation.** If our lives are not directed toward God in our every decision of each day, then even our most passionate efforts & causes amount to polishing brass on the Titanic. Day by day this world with its values & attitudes & autonomy is passing away. The famous poem "Only One Life" by Charles T. Studd (1860–1931) captures John's point well:

Two little lines I heard one day, Traveling along life's busy way; Bringing conviction to my heart, And from my mind would not depart; Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.

Give me Father, a purpose deep, In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep; Faithful & true what e'er the strife, Pleasing Thee in my daily life; Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.

Oh let my love with fervor burn, And from the world now let me turn; Living for Thee, and Thee alone, Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne; Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last. (Karen Jobes, *Op Cit*, pp. 144-6)