

Where is your treasure? ¹

Introduction

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? Mar 8:36 ESV

John, the author of this letter, heard Jesus say these things when he was with Him. I suspect they were in his mind as he wrote this next part of his letter.

Looking at the broader context of this passage, back in 1 Jn 2:7, John wrote Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. Then in verse 9, Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Jumping down to verse 24, he said *Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.* And right in middle of those verses we have this passage, 1 Jn 2:15-17.

As I dug into this passage, it became a bit uncomfortable, and I almost hesitate to share this with you because it might be an “inconvenient truth.” I hope it doesn’t apply to you, but if it does, that is scary. John is writing a yardstick to measure the genuineness of our Christianity in these few verses.

1Jn 2:15-17 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 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. (17) And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

The Bible is always relevant, in every age. Here a 2,000 year old document that speaks straight into the 21st Century. There are some serious warnings for us in here, which we would do well to think about and compare to our own lives. It would be easy to get the impression in our materialistic society that “*He who dies with the most toys, wins.*” John challenges us right here about our materialism, and we would do well to examine ourselves in light of this.

Definitions

First let’s define some terms so we can understand what John is saying:

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Love - There are 2 types of love described in the Bible. The first is:

- 1) Gk *phileo* a natural affection that develops without effort or will.

There are some people you just click with, and that take no effort to love. Others may grow on you over a period of time, but still without any real conscious effort or decision to love them. That essentially is *phileo*.

- 2) That is distinct from Gk *agapao* love as a choice of the will. This is the word used here.

Sometimes you meet people who rub you up the wrong way. They are not an obvious choice as a friend, and in reality they take some effort to love. *Agapao* is a decision to love another in spite of their quirks, oddities, annoying traits, etc.

It is a conscious decision to love someone or something.

Phileo can develop after the choice to *agapao* someone, or *agape* can develop out of *phileo*. They are not mutually exclusive.

World = Gk *kosmos*

- 1) World as in physical, created universe.

- a) Not wrong to love God's creation in the sense of appreciating it, enjoying it and caring for it.
- b) Is wrong when it becomes our all-consuming passion to care for the environment, regardless of who suffers in the process or what laws are broken doing it.
- c) Is wrong when it leads to worshipping "the mother goddess" or "Gaia" or leads to involvement in Wicca.

- 2) World as in the people of the earth.

- a) God so loved the world....

- 3) World as in the mass of humanity alienated from God, and the principles they live by, and the desires that motivate them.

Desires of the flesh = Gk *ho epithumia ho sarx*

This is a longing for, a lusting after the things that make us *feel* good, the things that appeal to what is sometimes called the *animal nature*. Sensual and impure desires that seek gratification in sex, alcohol, gluttony, regardless of the cost to self *or to others*. It is the life that is dominated by the senses;

Examples: drunken parties, affairs or sleeping around are obvious ones. But there are others which have become more common in recent years; the obsession with body image which leads to strict dieting, gym workouts, cosmetic surgery, etc in an attempt to *feel* good. The desire to be comfortable and not threatened or challenged by anything. This may lead to drug or alcohol abuse to block out the pain and discomfort of living, or a luxurious home in a gated community with the home theatre system, enormous lounge suite and all the latest movies.

The desires of the flesh are not necessarily gross sins, such as the paedophile who seeks his satisfaction on sex-tours in Thailand. It can apply to anyone who seeks pleasure which may be the ruin of others. Think about the cost of your comfortable lifestyle. Are those latest gadgets, or those new shoes made by someone who lives and works in virtual slave conditions in Asia? William Barclay says, "Anyone who lives in luxury while others live in want, anyone who has made a god of his own comfort, and of his own ambition, in any part of his life, is the servant of the flesh's desire."

Desires of the eyes = Gk *ho epithumia ho ophthalmos*

That which is designed to gratify the sight; the spirit which identifies luxury with happiness and prosperity, that can see nothing without wanting to have it, and wants to show it off when it has it. It is the spirit that believes happiness can be found in the things which money can buy and the eye can see.

Pride in possessions = Gk *ho alazoneia ho bios*

Boasting; arrogance or pride. This is the spirit of the person who wants to impress, always having done more, been better, richer, smarter, stronger than others. He likes you to know what he owns, where he lives, how much he earns, what he gives, what he has done, what he is going to do. It is the “look at me” attitude.

When we were on holidays recently, Mel got talking to the man in the shack next door. He made sure she knew he was a former champion waterskier, as was his wife. He had installed 3 new airconditioners in his shack.

Diagnosis

The first example of the desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes and pride in possessions is found way back in Genesis 3:6.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Gen 3:6 ESV

The tree was good for food – the desires of the flesh

It was a delight to the eyes – the desires of the eyes

The tree was to be desired to make one wise - pride in possessions

Eve could see nothing in the fruit of the tree to suggest it may be bad for her. Rather, it looked good, and appealing. Sin is like that. It makes something look good, look attractive, look harmless at the time. But the consequences are deadly.

So, what is it about humanity that makes us like this?

James warns in his letter, *each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Jas 1:14-15 ESV*

Let's think about this. Last Christmas Day, you probably sat down to an enormous lunch. You had roast beef, roast turkey, maybe roast lamb as well. There were lashings of roast vegetables, salads, and bread rolls. The table was covered with bowls of lollies and chocolates. And you finished off with plum pudding, brandy custard, cream and icecream, and a cheese platter. The whole lot was washed down with litres of softdrinks, apple ciders, wine and beer, then a nice cappuccino to finish. You were so full, you could

barely move. Could I entice you with a nice hotdog, or a chicken schnitzel? Probably not. And the reason why? You are full, full to the gills, there is not another empty place to put any more food. But before you started eating, you were starving, and the smell of the roast cooking made you mouth water.

Food only tempts because of an emptiness in our stomach. Worldly things only tempt because of an emptiness in our soul.

The desires of the flesh, etc, then, indicate an emptiness, and a need to be filled. You won't be tempted to chase after something when you are already full.

I read a quote in a magazine which said that "*Drinking alcohol and getting drunk, provided you can handle it, is what makes life worth living.*"

The British Humanist Association has a slogan which says: "*There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.*" If you think through their slogan, they are partly right and partly wrong, it seems to me. If there is no God, then everything happened by chance, and no one or nothing has any control over what is happening, so there is no point worrying about stuff.

But if that is true, what basis is there for enjoying life? If everything was accidental, and there is no one in control, then there is no purpose or meaning to life. History and experience show that life consists in pain, struggle, toil, fights, loss, disappointments, grief and death. What's to enjoy about all that? Even the rare moments that things go smoothly have no purpose or meaning, therefore are empty of any *real* pleasure.

If there is no God, then we can really do no more than grab whatever fleeting moments of pleasure pass us by, or manufacture artificial moments of pleasure whenever we can. The prevailing philosophy must be "*If it feels good, do it.*" This is precisely the attitude to life that John is warning us against.

There are at least 4 problems with living like this that come to mind:

1. Not a Christian

The first one is frightening, and I almost hesitate to say it, but it is right there in the text. That is the very real possibility that you are not a Christian, even if you say you are. John makes no bones about the fact that *if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*. This is a frightening prospect if you claim to be a Christian.

2. Idolatry

We pride ourselves on not being idolaters in Western society. We don't bow down to statues or offer sacrifices to idols, but that doesn't mean we are not idolaters. Our idolatry is just a little more subtle. We bow down before the gods of body-image and sacrifice on the altar of exercise regimes, dieting and plastic surgery. Or we bow down to the gods of business success, and sacrifice our family and our emotional health to the boss. Or to the gods of materialism, stretching credit cards to the limit because we really really need that new TV or Playstation or car, and stressing about

how to pay the next bill. Or maybe we can say with pride that we don't do any of these things; we only drink more than we should, eat to the point of gluttony, download porn, and train our minds with endless doses of Oprah and Dr Phil. If it feels good, do it!

Don't pretend that Christians are immune to the temptations to indulge the flesh like this. It is no less a problem for us than it is for the rest of the world. In fact, it is more of a problem for us, because we are called to live for a higher purpose. The unbeliever has nothing better to live for. Ask yourself a simple question- "Has your latest purchase quenched the thirst in your soul? Has your most recent thrill, your promotion, your marriage, your child, left you totally satisfied inside?" Of course not; it never satisfies.

If you, as a Christian, are indulging your senses with these things, then I have only 2 words for you: **Stop It!** Make that 3 words: **Stop It Now!!**

3. Living as if there is no God.

What does it reveal about what we really, truly believe about God when we live as if He doesn't exist, and as if there is no eternity? When there is nothing more important for us than satisfying our latest craving? What does it teach the unbeliever about us and about God? Do they have any grounds for accusing us of being hypocrites?

You will remember that Jesus said there would be some who come on judgment day saying "*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?*" And then will I declare to them, "*I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.*" Mat 7:23 If that will be His response to those who thought they were doing God's will, what will be His response to those who wilfully choose to live as if He doesn't exist?

4. Living as if there is no tomorrow

The world is passing away along with its desires John warns us. We know that to be true. Who was the last person you can name who took his wealth with him to the other side, or his electronic goodies, or his expensive car, or anything else? Didn't they all remain behind to be frittered away or ruined by his family, friends and descendants?

You can't take it with you when you die, and one day the world will come to an end, and *every one* of these trinkets will be worthless.

Even worse than being worthless, they may be damning to your soul. In the craving to get more of the junk now, we can lose everything of value later. You will remember that Jesus said *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?* Mar 8:36 ESV

But there is a God, and we have an emptiness in our soul which can only be filled by Him. Someone once said, "*Nature abhors a vacuum.*" And just so, the vacuum in our

soul left by our alienation from God needs to be filled. And if it is not filled with God, it will need to be filled with *stuff*. But it *must* be filled. And it will be filled with things that are *not* from the Father, but from the world. The world has *zero* interest in making your life good, or meaningful or valuable. *Zero*. But the Father has every intention of making it worthwhile, and knows just exactly what will do that. So, how should you go about avoiding the wrong stuff and seeking the right?

Separation from worldliness

We must learn how to live in the world, without being drawn in and contaminated by the desires of the flesh. In fact, the greatest danger we face as Christians is not persecution and death, but the slow, subtle temptation to compromise with the world, to conform to the world and to succumb to the desires of the flesh. We can be so easily caught up in chasing after the same things the world chases after that it becomes difficult to tell the difference between the Church and the world. We are under an obligation to be *different*.

Worldly temptations bombard us mercilessly ever moment of every day. How do we escape them or shield ourselves from them?

For some people, the need to protect themselves from worldliness means cutting themselves off from the world. In centuries gone by people have become monks or hermits to remove themselves from the damning influences and effects of the world. Even today there are Christian communities such as the Amish who try to insulate themselves from the world. More dangerous are the sects and cults that spring up and draw in the naïve, the gullible, the lonely, the desperate and the weak.

Is this our best response to this danger? There are probably some who have been called to the isolated, contemplative life, but for the vast majority of us, we are “in the world, but not of the world” (Jn 17:11, 14, 16).

*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which **he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.** 2Pe 1:3-5 ESV*

If you hope to make yourself acceptable to God, and more Christian in your behaviour by your own efforts, you will sadly fail. In fact, you will only be acting out what John has warned against. While you may not be attempting to feel good by “sex and drugs and rock’n’roll,” you are still trying to feel good about yourself by being a “good person.” It will only serve to bring you into captivity to legalism.

Living for forever

- 1) The first step is to submit your life to Christ. If you haven't done this, then the rest of these steps won't do you any good.
- 2) With that done, the Holy Spirit will begin His work of shaping you, moulding you into the image of Christ. But He does that through certain means. It doesn't just happen randomly and without any involvement by us. *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* Rom 12:2
ESV
 - a) Spend time in the Word of God.
 - b) Spend time in prayer.
 - c) Spend time in fellowship with others of like mind.
 - d) Spend time in worship.

By doing these things, the emptiness in the soul will become filled with the life and the presence of God Himself, to the point where there will be no room for the worldly desires.

In spite of the critics of Christianity, Jesus Christ is not trying to deprive us of our fun and our treasure. He is trying to direct us in the choice of it. He desires to help us make right and wise choices about our treasure. The whole balance and rhythm of our life will be determined by what treasures we choose to chase after. Your heart will follow after your treasure, because where your treasure is, there your heart is.

Think of this as an investment in the future. Whenever we invest in the future, there is a cost. But the cost now is insignificant compared to the future return. Even in the uncertain financial markets at the moment, the long-term investments pay off. John did a calculation recently that \$1,000 invested in superannuation now, at average rates of return, will be \$37,000 at retirement. That is an enormous return for a relatively small investment. But it still requires an investment and some sacrifice. That is \$1,000 that can't be spent on the desires of the flesh or eyes.

The point of this illustration is that an investment made now in the kingdom of God will bring a return far, far beyond our dreams or imagination.

Am I suggesting that all your possessions are sinful and that you must get rid of them? Not at all. But do you possess them or do they possess you? Are they your tools to help you to serve God and serve others, or are they your treasure to help you feel better about yourself, or to fill that incessant craving.

The treasures of the Father are infinite and eternal. And John reminds us that *whoever does the will of the Father abides forever.*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has

*blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,
Eph 1:3 ESV*

These promises, blessings and treasures begin with salvation and forgiveness of sin, and include being chosen, made holy and blameless, adoption by God Himself, grace, redemption, the revelation of God's will, an inheritance, the seal of the Holy Spirit, and more. And that is just for this life. Eternal security, and end to pain and suffering, an enormous celebration and feast, fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore as the Psalmist said await us in the life to come.

So, where is your treasure? Who or what do you love the most? I hope and pray that Jesus Christ Himself is your greatest treasure, and that your life bears witness to that fact. If He isn't your treasure, or your life doesn't match your profession, it's time to put it right, once and for all.

Prayer: