

Responding to the World

1 John 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. For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The albatross is an amazing bird that flies around the world several times in its life. The albatross can stay aloft for hours, and can stand being buffeted by gales, when it is in the air. The strange thing about the albatross is that it will quickly become seasick if it stands on the deck of a moving ship. Here is this amazing flier, that becomes sick once it lands and stands on a ship. That's something like a true Christian. A true Christian is in the world, and faces all the struggles of growing up, making ends meet, working hard, experiencing pain, loss, fatigue, disease, calamity and personal hardship. Christians can face these things, and a lot more, because the God-given faith they have endures some of the worst storms man can face. However, should a Christian decide to 'land' upon this world system, and make it some kind of home for himself, he will slowly become spiritually sick. The same one who can handle sword, famine, persecution, nakedness and distress for Christ's sake, will become weak, depressed, fearful and anxious once he settles down to love this world system.

Last week, we spent time examining what John means by *the world*. We saw that if we are to obey this commandment to not love the world, we need to know what it is. We must be able to recognise it. And we saw that worldliness is mainly a set of desires and beliefs that are found in the human heart. Satan plays on those desires and organises a world system which stimulates and provokes and rewards those desires, but they emanate from within the human heart. They are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. We briefly looked at what each one of those is.

But once you begin to detect worldliness, whether it's in the advertisements, or the shop displays, or the music, or the leisure activity, or the social gathering, you now have a responsibility. According to John, it is quite straightforward: don't love it. Because if you love those values and ambitions and desires, you love what God hates. And someone who, as a way of life, loves what God hates, does not know God. The love of the Father is not in him. That's why such strong words are given in James 4:4

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

There's something deadly serious here: if we love the world as a way of life, our souls are in danger of hell. We may, in fact, still be in the devil's family, loving what he loves.

So, John once again calls you to express the faith you claim to have in your heart with works. He calls on you to lay hold on eternal life by working out what you claim God has worked in. He calls on you to make your calling and election sure, with a simple statement: don't love the world or the things in the world.

Now what would be another way of saying, "I don't love something"? "I hate something". Correct? To not love the world is to hate the world. It is to think of the world as something repugnant to you. It is something you disdain, something you dislike, something you wish you could avoid. You reject its beliefs and ambitions, you frown upon its desires, and you turn away from it in your heart. You scorn its promises. You disbelieve its theories. You avoid participating in the promotion of its ideals. To hate the world is to utterly reject its ways and beliefs and desires

But how do we do that? I can begin by showing how not to do that.

1 Corinthians 5:9-10 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

Paul tells us that separation from the world does not mean avoiding society. To not keep company with anyone who is still in the world would mean catching the next rocket off this planet. Certain Christians down the ages have thought that this was a viable solution. The monastic movement in church history was the well-intentioned, but misguided, approach of many Christians who were grieved by the evils in the world, and sought to be separate from it by entering monasteries and cloisters. So these Christians locked themselves away in monasteries or abbeys, avoiding most contact with the world. And what do you think happened to Western society when those who loved God and knew His Word all went away into a cloister? Well, the salt and light it needed wasn't there. In fact, the Reformation only happened when one monk decided to publicly challenge the false teaching of the day, and nailed his 95 theses to the door of the chapel at Wittenburg.

You see, just as worldliness is not merely something out there, but something in here, so the command to not love the world is something we do primarily with our hearts and minds.

As we look through the New Testament on this topic, we can find three ways we learn not to love the world.

I. Set Your Affections on Christ

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Paul exhorts us to set our minds on things above. He tells us to seek what is above. He is using the word *above* not to suggest that heaven is literally up, but that we ought not to make our lives simply about this visible world. Real life, eternal life is not restricted to what is here below. For a Christian, the command is, put your heart over there. Put your love and your desire and your hope and your reward and your deepest pleasure above and beyond the physical world. Lift your eyes up from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, and pursue your deepest and greatest pleasures in God Himself. At His right hand are pleasures forevermore; in His presence is fullness of joy.

The greatest way to overcome the love of the world is with a superior love. In 1 John, you are given the negative: don't love the world or the things in the world. In Colossians, you are given the positive: love Christ, love and seek the things of Christ.

Years ago there was a pastor by the name of Thomas Chalmers who lived and taught in Scotland in the 19th century. Chalmers wrote a sermon in called "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." In that sermon, Chalmers says the best way to expel a wrongful desire, is with a new and better desire. The best way to defeat the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is with a new affection. He goes on to say what we all know by experience: you cannot rip something out of the human heart, without replacing it with something new and better. You cannot tell a group of people to not love the world if the world is all they have. You must present to them the superior joys and pleasures and promises and beauties and satisfactions found in Christ.

For you to really displace the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life from your heart, you need to have your heart's affections to be feasting on and celebrating Christ.

For that reason, I exhort you to guard your imagination. Our hearts are moved by our imaginations. Our affections are stirred up and raised and pushed and pulled by the imagination. Many different things reach and affect us imaginatively: music, painting, sculpture, poetry, literature, and probably most immediately – TV and film. And by way of exposure, we are stocking our minds with images (not just pictures), but images of what life is about, what is exciting, what is thrilling, what love is, what strength is, what courage is, what kindness is, what marriage is, what trust is. And if the images are those of worldliness, and we do not filter them, mentally reject them, or flat-out avoid them, we will find developing in us a love for the things of the world. No one goes to a lecture about why worldliness is good. No one has to be persuaded through the mind. The world does not try to persuade us to embrace its ideal through discursive lectures given by men with polka-dot bow-ties and little spectacles low down on their noses. The world stirs up affections through the imagination. Hundreds of thousands of images that carry the values of worldliness slowly seep into the pores of our mind, causing our hearts and minds to love the things of the world.

God likewise reaches us through the imagination. His Word is largely a book which reaches our imaginations. One third of it is poetry, which deal entirely in imagery and images created through the actual structure. Another huge section is prophecy, which abounds in graphic imagery. Narrative, real life stories, makes up a huge section. Even the Law, is a massive section of laws with symbolic meaning. A fairly small section is pure discursive, abstract writing, and even there, Paul, James, John, Peter and Jude write with images all the time. God is always telling us what He is like through imagery. Soak yourself in this imagery. Soak yourself in the imagery of good hymnody. Let those images inflame your heart to love God and His things. And then guard your imagination.

So Christian, do not be content with simply avoiding obscenity, or profanity, or blasphemy, or nudity. Some of the most dangerous things have none of those things. However, they teach values, which stay with us. So don't pat yourself on the head if the movie you watched had no swearing or explicit sex. What if the heroine was vain and obsessed with herself? What if the hero was arrogant and proud? What if you found yourself cheering the revenge of one man over another? What if some kind of adultery was endorsed? What if the aim of life is portrayed as personal happiness and material comfort? What if rebellion and unbridled freedom were glorified? What if the music portrayed life as cacophonous, chaotic and meaningless? What if it portrayed life as sweeter than it actually is? What if it portrayed life as hopeless and despairing?

You see, if all you are looking to filter out is SNLV, you are going to be like a very bad Internet filter, which catches a few things, and lets everything else in. You will catch the raw and dirty forms of worldliness, but miss all the rest, which is usually 90% of the rest. And worse, you'll not notice how worldly you are becoming, because you have convinced yourself that worldliness is swearing and sex scenes. Take care of your imagination. There is still a wealth of things to listen to, read, or see that are not destructive to a Christian worldview, and are helpful in forming the religious imagination.

Don't stand with your mouth open under the Hollywood sludge pump, hoping that some good stuff will come out. Get yourself a list of the kinds of books, music, poetry, and film you want to watch or hear. Ask for help from others to put those things together. Once you know where you're headed, you tend to keep discovering new treasures.

II. Be Transformed in Your Thinking

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Don't be conformed; be transformed. The word for conformed means to be pressed into a mould. The world has a shape it wants you to be. It wants you to be and act a certain way. We talk about teens facing peer pressure. But in fact, everyone faces peer pressure. The world is always leaning on you, through a kind of social pressure, to act like it does, to get on its bandwagon, join the materialist race, keep up with the Joneses, go into debt over your head, and impress others. Live for yourself, amuse yourself mindlessly, have no restraint on your physical appetites.

And we all know the pain of being the party-pooper, the odd-one-out who doesn't laugh at the dirty joke, join in the drinking party or otherwise get with the program. A kind of social pressure is exerted. Do you want to be *in*, or do you want to be *out*?

Here Paul tells us what to do with that. Don't be conformed. Don't let them squeeze you into their mould. Don't let them intimidate you into being like them. Instead, be transformed. How? By the renewing of your mind.

As you get a new way of thinking, you are changed in your character. You become less like the world, and more like Christ. As you soak yourself in the Word of God, your thought-patterns are increasingly unlike that of the world, and so you are not likely to love it, or be conformed to it.

You see, as you well know, the world has an opinion on everything. It has an opinion on money. It has an opinion on family, on marriage, on child-rearing, on sex, on health, on leisure, on work, on morality, on ethics, on death, on spirituality, on politics, on economics. And many Christians do not realise how worldly they still are in their thinking on various subjects. I listen to some Christians talk about marriage, family, budgeting, business, relationships, and I know those ideas did not come from the Bible. Oh, they make sense to the person; otherwise he or she wouldn't believe them. But where did they get them from? From parents, personal experience, personal analysis, watching talk-shows, reading columnists, talking to others.

Once again, we confine worldliness to a few taboos, and do not see how much of it is contained in our own thinking. Some believers have expectations for a kind of pampered life that would be utterly foreign to most believers who have gone before us for 5000 years. Some believers have adopted views on family that Christians of just over 100 years ago would have been puzzled by. Some believers have views on authority and submission that are pragmatic, but quite unbiblical. We must not let the world push us into its shape. Many believers judge success by the world's standards- just look around at what churches and ministries want: larger crowds, more popularity, more money, bigger buildings, and more clout. I recently read of a Baptist church in Texas beginning a \$132 million building program. Again, as David Wells has said, worldliness is whatever makes sin seem normal and righteousness seem strange.

The Word of God is everything we need for life and godliness. When it doesn't speak explicitly on a subject, it gives us principles we can apply to it. When it doesn't give us principles, it still supplies us with wisdom to use as we examine the topic. To not be worldly means trying to get the mind of God on all things. It means trying to reflect on things, weigh up opinions, judge them in light of Scripture. It means examining your own presuppositions, your own lifestyle and measuring all the

opinions you hear by the Word of God. Study the Bible for certain topics. Buy trustworthy Christian books on the topic you're interested in. Be transformed in your thinking.

We do not love the world firstly by fixing our hearts on things above, protecting our imaginations and feeding them what pleases God. Secondly, we do not love the world by allowing our minds to be renewed by the Word of God, in which is the will of God.

III. Partake Without Polluting Partnerships

You have often heard it said we are in the world, but not to be of the world. That is true. We live in the world and partake of its gifts.

1 Corinthians 7:31 and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.

We live on this physical planet, amongst people whom we are to love as neighbours. We are not supposed to avoid unbelievers. At the same time, we all understand that there are varying levels of friendship, association or closeness we can enjoy with people. And since unbelievers are firmly in the grip of the world, this limits how deeply we can share our lives with them, and partake in their practices.

Jesus made it very clear that believers and unbelievers are on opposite sides.

John 15:19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

John 17:6 I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.

John 17:9 "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.

John 17:14-16 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Paul made it very clear that his salvation had put him apart from the world.

Galatians 6:14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Once you are a born again believer, you are no longer in the same spiritual family as unbelievers are. You may still have a lot in common in terms of family bonds, interests, but at the deepest level, you are pulling in completely different directions. You are two different animals. And any farmer knows you don't try to yoke up a bull with a sheep to pull a plough. You don't yoke a cow and a goat. They're mismatched. They're unequal, uneven.

And so we read in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?¹⁶ And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For

you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." ¹⁷ Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." ¹⁸ "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

Don't be in a relationship with an unbeliever where you share in the relationship as partners, pulling in the same direction. In other words, dating and courtship, and marriage would be one. You are so different, the Bible says, you do not have real fellowship, agreement, or partnership.

The same would apply for close business partnerships, particularly if you are a business owner. It's one thing getting capital from unbelievers, it's another having them steer the ship of your own business. Of course we work with and sometimes for unbelievers, but we are not to bind ourselves to them in close partnering relationships. When we do that, it is only a matter of time before the world extinguishes our light.

You might remember Abraham's nephew Lot. He is the prime example of a believer who became entrapped and ultimately polluted by the world. Look at the progression in his life:

First, he was facing it and being drawn to it.

Genesis 13:12-13 Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.

Second, he had formed partnerships with people in Sodom and was caught up in its troubles.

Genesis 14:10-12 Now the Valley of Siddim was full of asphalt pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; some fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains. Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

Third, he had settled, and found it hard to leave. He was not taken seriously by his neighbours, nor by his sons-in-law.

Genesis 19:5-9 And they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally." So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, and said, "Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! "See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof." And they said, "Stand back!" Then they said, "This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them." So they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door.

Genesis 19:14-16 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, "Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!" But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking. When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.

In the end, Lot was polluted by partaking unequally with unbelievers. He lost his sense of discernment. He lost his moral compass. He lost his sensitive conscience. Not because he was in the world, but because his heart was becoming like one who is of the world.

Lot's story ends in tragedy, with his daughters committing incest with him as they find themselves without anything, living in caves.

How many times have we seen the sad outcome of a girl who claims to be a Christian, but receives the advances of an unbeliever, till it ends up in a relationship, or even a marriage of uneven, unequal proportion. The gold wrapper comes off, and life is miserable.

That's why Psalm 1 promises a blessing to those who do not love the world in this way:

Psalm 1:1-2 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

You cannot hate the world system if you are in an unequal partnership with unbelievers. In an unequal partnership, you share common ambitions, goals, desires, aims, loves. It is inevitable when you do this, that you will find it hard, if not impossible to love the things of God more.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

An illustration often used in youth groups to prove this point is to have a chair in the middle of the circle, and to get one person to stand on that chair. Then you get another person to come up to the one on the chair. You tell the person on the chair to try to pull the one on the ground up onto the chair, and you tell the person on the ground to try and pull the person on the chair off. Which is easier? It's always easier to pull someone down; you have gravity working in your favour. It is very hard to pull someone up. So in relationships, it is very easy to pull someone down from their high affections for God. Very hard, impossible, in fact, to pull an unbeliever up to love what you love.

If the world becomes your companion, you will share their amusements, their attractions, their ambitions. John Newton's life rule: "I make it a rule of Christian duty never to go to a place where there is not room for my Master as well as myself.

You might remember the story of the boys who caught two crows. They decided they wanted their black and ugly crows to at least have beautiful voices. So they put the crows in a cage, and placed the cage next to that of a canary with a beautiful voice. Weeks went by with no change in the squawking and ugly croaking of the crows. Then one day they heard a strange sound. "Listen", said the one boy to the other. "We've never heard that before". They moved closer to hear. Their eyes went wide and they said at almost the same time – "the canary is croaking like a crow!"

So what is the alternative? We're social creatures, we can't be solitary. Well, what is one of the greatest themes of 1 John? Love one another! The alternative to loving worldly people in an unequal fashion, is to love your own spiritual family. Be with one another. Enjoy one another. Keep one another company. Enjoy leisure together. We have no continuing city here. We are the church, the *ekklesia* – the called out ones, the chosen and set-apart ones. Our deepest ties, bonds, fellowship are together.

I've been attempting to show you with all three, that it is not a matter of mere negative putting off, but a very important putting on. There is removal, shunning, separating, hating, but then there is cleaving, loving, embracing fellowshiping. Do not love what the world loves, but set your affections on God's things, by letting your imagination be enriched and soaring with godly imagery. Do not think like the world thinks, but soak your mind in the Word of God to find the will of God

on all things. Do not partake with the world as equals. Love them as neighbours, but love one another as true partners.