

09. The Epistle of 1 John—2:15-17

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(7/3/19)

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In our last study in 1John, we saw how John called out and condemned those in the church who claimed to have a relationship with Jesus Christ but who hated other Christians as self-deceived unsaved phonies—

1 John 2:9 (NKJV)

⁹ **He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.**

After dealing with these 'counterfeit Christians', John then turned his attention to genuine believers in Christ by challenging them to grow into mature adult members of the family of God—

1 John 2:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² **I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³ I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one...**

John tells us there are three stages of spiritual growth for believers in Christ—little children, young men, and mature fathers.

John is calling on all believers in Christ to go on to maturity and to understand that we are in a war against the devil and his demons and that the only way to defeat the enemy is by knowing and using the Word of God.

1 John 2:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ **...I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.**

The Word of God (a.k.a.—the 'Sword of the Spirit') when studied and put into practice in a believer's life will cause them to *grow* and *overcome* the devil—but only if it is put into practice.

But just knowing the Bible intellectually is good but not enough to cause growth and victory in a Christian's life—

James 1:22 (NKJV)

²² **But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**

Hebrews 5:12-14 (NKJV)

¹² **For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**

The goal of Christianity is to *grow* into strong men and women of God who know His Word and can use it to defeat the wicked one. But as we said last time—the quickest way for Satan to hinder or stop that growth altogether is thru worldliness!

So, this becomes ‘ground-zero’ in our battle with the devil (spiritual warfare)—a battle for control of our heart. Or in other words, Who or what are we going to love more—God or the world?

Godly Christians defeat the enemy—worldly Christians are defeated by the enemy!

So that’s what John begins to warn the children of God to be on guard against—

1 John 2:15-17 (NKJV)

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 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.** ¹⁷ **And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**

These 3 verses are some of the most insightful and important in the Bible for understanding how Satan tries to defeat a child of God—by getting them to ‘**love the world**’ (worldliness).

First of all, when John says that children of God must not ‘**love the world**’—he uses the Greek word ‘*kosmos*’.

‘*Kosmos*’ is a word that doesn’t mean the ‘*planet earth*’ but—the fallen world system which is controlled by Satan. Planet earth was created by God and is a beautiful and awesome thing to behold—not worshipped (Romans 1:20-25) but enjoyed and used to worship the Creator who made it out of nothing!

On the other hand, *kosmos* is a word that refers to the domain of Satan (the god of this world) with all of its temptations and lusts—and therefore must not be loved by God’s people.

In fact, James said, “*friendship with the world is enmity with God?*” (James 4:4).

One pastor put it this way—

*“Kosmos (**world**) does not refer to the physical earth or universe but rather to the spiritual reality of the man-centered, Satan-directed system of this present age, which is hostile to God and God’s people. It refers to the self-centered, godless value system and mores of fallen mankind. The goal of **the world** is self-glory, self-fulfillment, self-indulgence, self-satisfaction, and every other form of self-serving, all of which amounts to hostility toward God.”*

As I said, verses 15-17 of 1John 2 are some of the most insightful in the Bible for understanding spiritual warfare—because they outline for us the areas of our fallen nature that Satan will target with temptation and try to use to defeat us—so be on guard!

1 John 2:15-17 (NKJV)

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 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.** ¹⁷ **And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**

Now, when John said that these are the three areas that Satan will target in our lives with temptation to bring us down—I believe he had in mind the very first temptation of Satan recorded in the Bible (the law of first-mention)—

Genesis 3:1-7 (NKJV)

¹ Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³ but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' " ⁴ Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

Notice how Satan's temptation of Eve in the Garden coincides with the temptations that John tells us Satan will use against all of us—

- **"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food"** (the lust of the flesh)
 - **"...that it was pleasant to the eyes"** (the lust of the eyes)
 - **"...a tree desirable to make one wise..."** (the pride of life)
- Satan even used this attack on Jesus in the wilderness—

1. Stones to bread (the lust of the flesh)—**Matthew 4:3**

2. Jump from the pinnacle of the temple (the pride of life)—**Matthew 4:5-6**

3. Kingdoms of the world (the lust of the eyes)—**Matthew 4:8-9**

Notice that, in Matthew 4, three times Satan came at Jesus with three different temptations and three times the Lord countered by saying *"It is written"*.

The Word of God is our weapon (Sword) against Satan's attacks. (2Cor.10:3-4)

These 3 temptations have been used very successfully by Satan to destroy many lives, marriages and ministries—let's look at them briefly.

I. The Lust of the Flesh

In the Bible, the word **'flesh'** can refer to the *physical* body—but most of the time it is used in the New Testament to represent our *fallen nature*.

Our sinful fallen nature is that rebellious nature we were born with that was passed down to us from our father Adam when he fell after rebelling against God in the Garden of Eden. A Christian has both the old nature (flesh) and the new nature (spirit) in his or her life—and what a battle these two natures can wage against each other!

Galatians 5:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ For the flesh [our fallen sinful nature] wars [constantly fights] against the Spirit [within us], and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. [i.e. 'obey God completely in all things He has commanded']

When the Bible talks about the *flesh* with regard to our physical bodies, it's important we understand that—God has given the human body legitimate drives for the survival of mankind and the perpetuation of the human race.

They are in descending order of intensity: the air drive, the water drive, the sleep drive, the food drive, and the sex drive. When these physical drives are kept under the control of the Holy Spirit, they are normal, legitimate and beneficial.

However, when they are allowed to be controlled by man's sinful fallen nature—they become perverted and destructive—what the Bible calls the *"lusts of the flesh."* Thirst becomes drunkenness, hunger becomes gluttony, sleep becomes laziness and sex becomes immorality.

When these *lusts* are given into and acted upon—they become the '*works of the flesh*'.

Galatians 5:19-21 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

So how can we resist the devil's temptation with regard to the 'lust of the flesh'?—

Galatians 5:16 (NKJV)

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

What does it mean to **walk in the Spirit**?

1. It means that the Holy Spirit *lives in you*—that you're saved.
2. It means to be *surrendered* and *obedient* to what the Spirit has revealed in His Word as to the will of God for your life.
3. It means to be *open* and *sensitive* to the influence and leading of the Holy Spirit in your daily life. Remember, whatever nature you feed will be the dominant force in your life—if you feed the *flesh* it will dominate you, and if you feed the *spirit* it will control you—it's up to you.

II. The Lust of the Eyes

The second area of our fallen nature the devil will target with temptation to defeat us in our walk with the Lord is thru—**"the lust of the eyes."**

This is what the Bible calls 'covetousness.'

This is a sin that isn't a big deal to many Christians anymore (it tends to 'fly' under our moral radar)—but it's so serious to God that it made His top ten list of prohibitions.

The 10th Commandment reads: "*You shall not covet [lust after] your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.*" (Exodus 20:17)

This coveting or lusting falls into two main categories:

A. The Lust For Possessions

Larry Burkett, who used to be (before he went home to the Lord) the premier Christian financial advisor in America said—

“Most young couples today want to have in 3 years what it took their parents 30 years to acquire, so they buy a house that’s bigger than they need, a car, a lawn mower, washers & dryers etc., until by the fourth or fifth year of marriage they are so far in debt and the financial pressures are so great that all they are doing is fighting over money and the bills that they decide its not worth it anymore—

‘I can’t stand my wife and she can’t stand me. If I could just get out of this and start all over again everything would be much better.’

And that’s often what happens—in 52% of the cases in America in the 5th year of marriage couples get a divorce because of financial pressures.

About 92% of all Americans say that they believe what destroyed their marriage was financial pressure. So they get divorced and go out and find 2 more people exactly like the 2 people they divorced, they marry them and with in 2 years you have 2 more couples doing exactly the same thing that caused the first marriage to dissolve, in fact, in 75% of the cases of the 2nd marriage it will dissolve in less than 5 years for exactly the same reasons that the first marriage failed in 92 or 93 percent of the time—money...”

For many people spending money is a form of therapy (Explain)

B. The lust for people

People are not only lusting after *possessions*—they are also lusting after other people.

Matthew 5:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Once again, I’m not really sure how many Christians today take this seriously—let alone those in the world. The problem is we are living in a sex crazed society where sex is being used to sell everything from toothpaste to automobiles.

You can’t go anywhere today without being bombarded with sexual images of some king or another (mannequin at the mall). Advertisers are constantly bombarding us with sexual stimuli that is designed to arouse lust (strong desire) for their products.

We see this kind of advertising on billboards, magazines, T.V., and the internet—and the more people are fed a constant diet of sexual images the more sex crazed they seem to get.

There has even been a *philosophy* that has been coined called “The Playboy Philosophy” which legitimizes sexual practices with anyone, at any time for any reason by claiming sex is nothing more than a biological function to be satisfied without moral consideration or consequences.

Hugh Hefner said, *“Why get so upset about sex—it’s only a biological necessity like eating, drinking and sleeping.”*

Of course, that attitude is nothing new—it comes right out of Greco-Roman paganism.

The attitude in the first century Greco-Roman world was that they looked at sex the same way they looked at eating, drinking, sleeping, and breathing—it was just another biological function to be satisfied without any moral implications whatsoever.

But you see the inevitable consequence of that philosophy is that you dehumanize women, and through pornography—they are turned into mere *objects* for sexual gratification. When you couple it with a mentality that says sex is only a biological function which we should seek to satisfy whenever the urge hits like we would satisfy the urge for food and water and sleep—you come up with an equation that first of all equals violent crimes against women.

So, the consequence of our sex-crazed culture is that rape has now surpassed murder as the number one violent crime in America. Secondly, it's a formula for the breakdown of marriage and ultimately the family (sexual desire being fueled by pornography and internet romance is destroying many marriages and with it families).

And this doesn't even begin to take into account the physical consequences of all this sexual promiscuity which is the spread of STD's of which AIDS is a part and now antibiotic resistant strains of gonorrhea.

III. The Pride of Life

The Greek word for “**pride**” was used to describe a braggart who was trying to impress people with his importance.

People have always tried to outdo others in their spending and in their possessing of material things—and the boastful pride of life motivates much of what these people do.

One author said,

“Why is it that so many folks buy houses, cars, appliances, or wardrobes that they really cannot afford? Why do they succumb to the “travel now, pay later” advertising and get themselves into hopeless debt taking vacations far beyond their means? Largely because they want to impress other people—because of their “pride of life.” They may want folks to notice how affluent or successful they are.”

Many would deny their spending is being motivated by a desire to impress others—but why then do they buy designer clothes and status symbol cars.

The pride of life has caused many to worship their bodies. For others, especially among men, the pride of life motivates them to succeed in business.

Many men have sacrificed their marriages and families on the altar of success (give Lee Iacocca quote).

1 John 2:15 (NKJV)

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.**

The more you let these three things draw you closer to the world the more they will draw you away from God—you can't serve two masters.

Satan is the true enemy and if he can draw you away from God, he can destroy your walk, your witness, your family, your faith and whatever else God is blessing your life with.

Matthew 6:19-21 (NLT2)

¹⁹ “Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

One author made this observation from history—

“On May 6, 1626 in exchange for some brass buttons, and scarlet cloth worth about \$24, Manhattan Island was purchased from the Manhattan Indian tribe by Peter Minuit, Dutch Governor of the New Netherlands Province who named the island New Amsterdam—It was later taken over by the British and renamed New York City.

If the Manhattan tribe had only known how valuable that piece of property would someday be, they no doubt would have kept it, but in their ignorance, they exchanged a priceless possession for some cheap bobbles.

Some of you are doing the same thing with the priceless possession God has given you—your marriage and family. The time is short—stop fighting each other and start praying together—men start being the husbands and fathers God has called you to be...”

1 John 2:15-17 (AMP)

Do not love *or* cherish the world or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh [craving for sensual gratification] and the lust of the eyes [greedy longings of the mind] and the pride of life [assurance in one's own resources or in the stability of earthly things]—these do not come from the Father but are from the world [itself]. ¹⁷ And the world passes away *and* disappears, and with it the forbidden cravings (the passionate desires, the lust) of it; but he who does the will of God and carries out His purposes in his life abides (remains) forever.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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