

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	1 John		Pastor/Teacher
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HEART WARNINGS

There was a time, not too long ago, when worldliness was associated with things like going to the movies, playing cards, dancing, smoking, drinking, swearing, wearing make-up – the list could go on with other examples – all of which had to do with things to avoid. But this kind of *monastic* mentality, like the poor, will always be with us. The notion that retreating from the world around us loses sight of one very important fact – regardless of where we go, we always take our sinful hearts with us! And what is it that characterizes the human heart? Our proneness to being deceived. One of the greatest successes of World War II was Operation FORTITUDE. This was the invention on the part of the Allies of a fantasy invasion force directed at the pas de Calais. Notionally under the larger-than-life General Patton, a fabricated “1 Army Group” was created in southeast England. Using a massive array of dummy landing craft and a signals network, a phoney order-of-battle was established bigger than the actual 21 Army Group which landed in France. The deception was so effective that it kept many of Rommel’s major Panzer divisions pinned down at Calais well after the D-day landings had taken place.¹

As a result of the Fall, *all* of humanity is in a state of spiritual darkness. As such we are easily deceived (Titus 3:3). In fact, as Jeremiah 17:9 tells us, our own hearts are utterly deceitful. Old John Newton observed, “The heart is here characterized, first, as deceitful, and that above or in all things: second, as desperately wicked: in so dangerous, so deplorable a state, as is not to be conceived or found out. ‘Who can know it?’ The word in the original (‘anash), which we translate *desperately wicked*, signifies a mortal, incurable disease; a disease which, seizing on the vitals, affects and threatens the whole frame; and which no remedy can reach. This idea leads us to that first transgression, whereby man, departing from God, fatally destroyed his soul’s health, and sunk into that state so pathetically described by Isaiah, chapter 1. ‘The whole head is sick;’ all the powers of the understanding disordered: ‘and the whole heart faint;’ all the springs of the affections enfeebled. ‘From the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness, but wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores;’ the evil growing worse continually, and no help or helper at hand: ‘they have not been closed nor bound up, nor mollified with ointment.’ In consequence of this deep-rooted disorder, the heart is deceitful; -- that is, it deceives and fails us in every instance: it promises more than it can perform: it misleads us with vain desires; and mocks us with unsuccessful efforts: like the faint attempts of a sick man, to perform those actions which require a state of sound health and strength.”² Christians are constantly warned about the danger of being deceived (Gal. 6:7; Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; 1 John 3:7), and that Satan is the great deceiver (2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9; 20:8; 1 Tim. 4:1). Richard Gilpin, the noted Puritan divine, wrote extensively on this subject: “*The subtlety that the Scriptures do attribute to sin, or to the heart, is mostly and chiefly intended to reflect upon Satan, as the author and contriver of these deceits.* In Heb. 3:13 there is mention of the ‘deceitfulness of sin,’ but it is evident that something else besides sin is intended, to which deceitfulness must be properly

ascribed; for sin being, as most conclude, formally a privation, or if we should grant it a positive being, as some contend, yet seeing the highest notion we can arrive at this way, excluding but the figment of Flacius Illyricus, who seem to make original sin indistinct from the very essence of the soul, is but to call it an act. Deceitfulness cannot be property attributed to it, but with reference to him who orders that act in a way of deceitfulness and delusion; which ultimately will bring it to Satan's door. If here the deceitfulness of sin be devolved upon the subject, then it runs into the same sense with Jer. 17:9, 'The heart is deceitful above all things.' But why is the deceitfulness fixed upon the heart? The ground of that we have in the next words: it is deceitful because it is wicked, 'desperately wicked.' But who then inflames and stirs up the heart to this wickedness? Is it not Satan? Who then is the proper author of deceit but he? It is true, indeed, that our hearts are proper fountains of sin, and so may be accused possibly in some cases where Satan cannot be justly blamed; yet if we consider deceitfulness as a companion of every sin, though our hearts are to be blamed for the sin, Satan will be found guilty of the deceitfulness. It may be said a man complies with those things which are intended for his delusion, and so improperly by his negligence may fall under blame of self-deception; but it is unimaginable that he can properly and formally intend to deceive himself. Deceit, then, not being from sin nor ourselves properly, can find out no other parent for itself than Satan. Besides this, that these texts upon a rational inquiry do charge Satan with the deceitfulness of sin; they do over and above point at the known and constant way of Satan, working so commonly by delusion, that deceitfulness is a close companion of every sin. The deceitfulness of one sin is as much as the deceitfulness of every sin. Nay, further, that text of Jer. 17:9, shews this deceitfulness not to be an ordinary sleight, but the greatest of all deceits above measure, and of an unsearchable depth or mystery; 'who can know it?'"³

I. THE CONTRAST. "Here John contrasts love for the world with love for the Father. The two loves are incompatible. As Jesus said, 'No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other' (Matt. 6:24). One love must rule our lives: a holy passion for God and the things of God. The Choice is clear and the directions simple, but the way is not easy. As Jesus said, 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak' (Matt. 26:41)."⁴

A. The identity of the *world*. There are several words in the Greek New Testament that are rendered with our English word: *gē* which signifies the land or earth (Rev. 13:3); *oikoumenē* which indicates the inhabited part of the earth (Luke 2:1); *aiōn* which marks out an age or period of time (Matthew 28:20); *kosmos* which denotes the present order of things (1 Peter 3:3, translated 'adorning'). It is the last word *kosmos* which the Apostle uses in the issuance of this appeal: "Love not the world." "The term *kosmos* (used here for the second time in 1 John; see 2:2) appears in the letters and Gospel of John with two basic meanings: the created universe, or life on earth (cf. 3:17; 4:17; also John 1:10); and human society, temporarily controlled by the power of evil, organized in opposition to God (cf. 5:19; 4:3-5; also John 16:11). It is the latter meaning which *kosmos* carries in this verse and vv. 16-17 (where the word occurs six times in all). According to the biblical witness, there is nothing wrong with God's living creation as such (John 1:3, 10; cf. Gen. 1:31, 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good'). Rather, as John sees, it is an attitude of *worldliness* which is culpable: a determination to be anchored to a society which by nature does not know God, and is inclined to reject him (3:1; cf. John 15:18-19; 17:25)."⁵

B. Rivals for the Heart. The warning to not love the world "would convey, as it does more or less to Christians in every age, a very definite and needful warning, and one that has many parallels in the Apostolic writings (*e.g.*, 2

Cor. 6:14-18, Jas. 4:4), ‘Love not the world.’ Do not court the intimacy and the favour of the unchristian world around you; do not take its customs for your laws, nor adopt its ideals, nor covet its prizes, nor seek fellowship with its life. ‘Neither the things that are in the world.’ For what are the things that are in this ‘world?’ This aggregate of unspiritual persons, with their opinions, pursuits, and influences – what are the elements of its life? They are such that ‘If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.’ God lays down one programme of life for His children; the world proposes another and totally incompatible programme to its servants. And in exact proportion as men are attracted by the world’s programme – the life of fullest gratification for all unspiritual instincts and appetites – they are tempted to mistrust and dislike the absolutely different programme of self-denying love and obedience which God lays out for them, and by which He would make them trustful, pure, patient, and strong. For, as the Apostle with inimitable terseness proceeds to expound, the essential constituents of the world’s life are these, ‘the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life.’ This is, literally ‘all that is in the world;’ there is nothing nobler which it is in its power to give.”⁶ The things of the world become all the more obvious with John’s three very striking phrases:

1. The flesh’s desires, lit. the cravings of sinful humanity. Barclay’s notes: “To us that expression has to do exclusively with sexual sin. But in the New Testament *the flesh* is that part of our nature which, when it is without the grace of Jesus Christ, offers a bridgehead to sin. It includes the sins of the flesh but also all worldly ambitions and selfish aims. To be subject to the flesh’s desire is to judge everything in this world by purely material standards. It is to live a life dominated by the senses. It is to be gluttonous in food; effeminate in luxury; slavish in pleasure; lustful and lax in morals; selfish in the use of possessions; regardless of all the spiritual values; extravagant in the gratification of material desires. The flesh’s desire is regardless of the commandments of God; the judgment of God, the standards of God and the very existence of God.”⁷
2. The lust of the eyes. This has to do with greed and covetousness. Stott says that this “seems to indicate temptations which assault us not from within, but from without through *the eyes*. This is ‘the tendency to be captivated by the outward show of things, without enquiring into their real values.’ Eve’s view of the forbidden tree as ‘a delight to the eyes,’ Achan’s covetous sight among the spoil of a ‘goodly Babylonish garment,’ and David’s lustful looking after Bathsheba as she bathed, are obvious examples (Gen. 3:6; Jos. 7:21; 2 Sam. 11:2).”⁸
3. The pride of life. This has to do with boasting. The Greek word *alazoneia* points to a braggart who exalts himself. It is what C. H. Dodd called *pretentious egoism*.⁹

CONCLUSION: F. F. Bruce notes, “Worldliness does not reside in ‘things,’ but it does certainly reside in our concentration on ‘things.’ If our affections, instead of being set on what is of permanent importance, are set on passing things that the heart desires and the eye delights in, or things that encourage us to have a good conceit of ourselves, we are fearfully impoverished. If my reputation, my ‘public image,’ matters more to me than the glory of God, or the well-being of my fellows, the ‘pretentiousness of life’ has become the object of my idol-worship.”¹⁰ Worldliness is deceitful and something that is an ever-present danger. Therefore, as Beeke warns, “We must strike out against the first appearance of the pride of life, the lusts of the flesh and eye, and all forms of sinful worldliness as they knock on the door of our hearts and minds. If we open the door and allow them to roam about in our minds and take foothold in our lives, we are already their prey. ‘Daniel purposed *in his heart* that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank: *therefore* he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself’ (Dan. 1:8; emphasis added). The material we read, the recreation and entertainment we engage in, the music we listen to, the friendships we form, and the conversations we have all affect our minds and ought to be judged in the context of Philippians 4:8: Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, ‘think on these things.’ We must live *above* the world and not be *of* the world while yet *in* the world (Rom. 12:1-2). If you stand *on* the Word, you will not stand *with* the world.”¹¹

ENDNOTES

¹ As cited in Melvin Tinker, *Evangelical Concerns: Rediscovering the Christian Mind on Issues Facing the Church Today* (Mentor, 2001), p. 176.

² *The Works of John Newton II* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1985), p. 262.

³ R. Gilpin, *Daemonologia Sacra; or A Treatise of Satan’s Temptations* (rpt. Soli Del Gloria, 2000), p. 53.

⁴ J. R. Beeke, *Overcoming The World: Grace to Win The Daily Battle* (P&R, 2005), p. 15.

⁵ S. S. Smalley, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John* (Word, 1984), p. 81.

⁶ R. Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of The First Epistle of St. John* (rpt. Baker, 1963), p. 148.

⁷ W. Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude* (The Saint Andrew Press, 1979), p. 57.

⁸ J. R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (Eerdmans, 1970), p. 61.

⁹ As cited by Barclay, p. 58.

¹⁰ Beeke, *op. cit.*, p. 92.