

**CHRISTIANITY** (*defined*)  
**A Study of 1 John**  
**“What in the WORLD is Worldliness?”**  
**1 John 2:15-17**

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**INTRODUCTION:** I heard a funny story about a monk who went to a very strict monastery that required the monks to observe a vow of silence. The monks could only speak two words a year. After a year, the monk went to his supervisor who said, “It’s been a year, what would you like to say?” The monk said, “Bed hard.” Another year passed, and the monk showed up again and spoke his two words. He said, “Soup cold.” Another year passed, and the monk showed up in the office again. He said, “I quit.” The head monk said, “I can see why. All you’ve done since you’ve been here is complain.”

When it comes to our relationship with the world, some well-meaning Christians have chosen to completely retreat from the world – that’s why we have monasteries. But John realized we need to live in this world, so he gives us some clear instructions about how to live. And he answers the question, **“What in the world is worldliness?”**

This section of First John is all about spiritual growth. Every Christian should ask themselves, “Am I growing as Christian?” In the doorway to Cindy’s study at our house, you’ll find a series of four sets of horizontal pencil lines drawn on the inside of the door trim. They represent the physical growth of my four grandchildren. It’s been fun to watch them grow taller, and for DeeDee to make a new line. And it’s official – all four of them are now taller than Cindy’s mother. So there is physical evidence that they have grown taller.

So what is the evidence that you are growing in the Christian faith? One of the best indicators is how well you perform in spiritual warfare. As followers of Jesus, we are involved in a spiritual battle. If you recall World War II, the Allies were fighting enemies on two fronts. There was the Pacific front and the European front. As Christians, we are fighting one enemy on three fronts. We battle the world, the flesh, and the devil. The devil is our infernal enemy. The flesh, or our sinful nature, is our

internal enemy, and the world is our external enemy. In this message, we're going to be talking about how to successfully have victory over the world, but it also relates to having victory over the flesh and the devil as well.

**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 everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.**

God never intended us to escape from the world live behind the walls of a monastery. He has sent us into the world to show the world God's love. We are to be IN the world, but the world shouldn't be IN us. It's like a boat in water. The boat is fine as long as it's IN the water, but when the water gets in the boat, there's a problem.

So as we relate to the world, John presents us with five choices that each one of us must make.

### **1. LOVING GOD IS BETTER THAN LOVING THIS WORLD.**

1 John 2:15 says: **“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.”**

When the Bible says, “don't love the world,” it's NOT talking about the world of humanity. Because the Bible says God so loved the world of humanity that He gave His only begotten Son. And it's not referring to this physical planet. The Bible says, “The earth is the Lord's and all the fullness in it.”

This word translated “world” is the Greek word *cosmos*. It means a system, a mindset, and a lifestyle. We talk about the world of sports or the world of fashion. We get our English word cosmopolitan from it – there's a drink and a magazine with that name. And a cosmopolitan person it is someone with international sophistication.

But in this context, *cosmos* means a mindset and a lifestyle that is opposed to God and the things of God. New Testament scholar Dr. Warren Wiersbe describes it this way in his commentary on this passage:

**“The ‘world’ named here as our enemy is an invisible spiritual system opposed to God and Christ. Satan is called ‘the god of this world’ (2 Cor. 4:4) and he leads an organization of evil spirits working with him to oppose the work of Christ on earth. Just as the Holy Spirit uses people to accomplish God’s will on earth, so Satan uses people to fulfill his evil purposes.”** (Be Real, pp. 66-67)

The Bible talks about the children of this world as contrasted with the Children of God. We read about the wisdom of this world being different than the Wisdom of God. And I’ve even heard people refer to someone as a “worldly Christian.” Vance Havner said: **“You can no more talk about a worldly Christian than to talk about a heavenly devil. The two words are a contradiction of terms.”**

The Apostle John wrote that you can’t love the world and love God at the same time. This is what Jesus meant when He said in Matthew 6:24: **“No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”** The actual word in Greek is mammon. In Medieval literature Mammon was the name given to a scary demon who ruled over greed and the debilitating accumulation of wealth.

You cannot love God and money. You have to make a choice.

John is warning Christians then and now, NOT to love the world or the things of the world. Then he lists three things of the world that want to draw us into the trap of worldliness: the lust of the flesh; the lust of the eyes; and the pride of life. Let’s talk about each of these.

**2. FOLLOWING YOUR NEW NATURE IS BETTER THAN FOLLOWING YOUR SINFUL NATURE.** Verse 16 says, **“The lust of the flesh ... is from the world.”** When you are born again, God doesn’t destroy your sinful nature, He gives you a new nature. It would sure make the Christian life easier if God just removed that old sinful nature, but we still battle with it every day.

In Romans 7 Paul bemoaned the fact that the bad things he didn’t want to do, he found himself doing. And the good things he should be doing – he didn’t do them. So if you are a Christian and you struggle with sin,

that's normal. A lost person doesn't really struggle with sin. Sin is easy for them.

God has given all of us normal appetites. And He has provided safe, good ways to have those appetites satisfied. But the world, the flesh, and devil push us to satisfy those cravings or appetites in unhealthy ways. For instance, God has given everyone a sex drive – and he has given us the relationship of marriage to satisfy this desire. And Paul even wrote that some people have the gift of singleness and don't need to be married. But when it comes to sex, the world says, "There are no rules. No limits. Sex with anyone at any time as long as it is consensual is fine. Live it up!"

We have a healthy appetite for food – and the world says overeat or fill your body with food and substances that aren't good for you.

We have a God-given desire for rest – and the world says, "Be lazy – sleep all the time." The book of Proverbs is full of warning about the dangers of laziness.

I think we all understand being pulled in two directions. In cartoons, a person faced with a moral decision was often portrayed as having an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other shoulder. The devil keeps saying, "Don't worry about sin. Go for it. Everybody's doing it. Besides, there are no consequences to sin."

Meanwhile the angel is whispering. "Do what is right. God has established boundaries for a reason. If you do this, you'll be sorry."

That's the way our two inner natures struggle with each other.

A missionary who took the Gospel to the people living in the arctic areas of Alaska relates a story about talking to the chief of one of the tribes who had converted to Christ. The chief complained to the missionary that he struggled with sin. He said, "It's as if there is a big black dog inside me leading me to do evil, but there is a white dog inside me that is leading me to do what is right. These dogs are constantly battling within me." The missionary asked, "Which dog wins? And with great insight and wisdom the tribal chief said, "The one I feed the most."

So which of your two natures are you feeding? What are you reading, watching, and listening to? You can either feed your sinful nature, or your new nature by what you allow into your brain.

**3. BEING CONTENT IS BETTER THAN COVETING.** The second desire of the world is called, **“The lust of the eyes ... is from the world.”** The word “lust” really doesn’t only have a sexual connotation. It can be looking at anything and wanting that thing that you see. It’s the sinful tendency we have to look at something new and shiny and think, “Wow! I wish I had that!” This tendency is the basis for the entire world of advertising.

God realized that we all have this tendency to look and crave. That’s why He added that 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment. He said, **“You shall not covet your neighbor’s possessions or your neighbor’s people.”**

The word “covet” is the Hebrew word *chamad*, which means to “have an intense desire” for something. Actually, there’s nothing wrong with coveting—if you covet the proper thing. I might say to you, “I covet your prayers.” There’s certainly nothing wrong with that. It is the **object** of our covetousness that makes certain desires a sin.

It seems as if we’re all trying to “keep up with the Joneses.” That means that when we see our neighbor with more “stuff” than we have, it makes us want (covet) to have at least as much as they have. If they get a new car, we feel we need a new car, too. If we see a new flat screen television being delivered to their house, we start scheming how we can get one.

Covetousness (greed) makes a person a victim of a vicious cycle of dissatisfaction. If your goal in life is to get more things and to accumulate possessions, you will never be satisfied. If you get a new car, before long it gets a little dull or scratched, and you start noticing all the newer and shinier models on the street. You assumed that your new automobile would satisfy for a while, but it didn’t. You buy a new home and think it is so wonderful, but you’ll soon start noticing that there is always another house that is bigger and better than yours. If “having the best” becomes the primary source of satisfaction in your life, you are cursed because you never will be satisfied.

The cure for covetousness is contentment in Christ. Contentment means being satisfied with what you have. Texas is the best state in America to live in, but according to the Bible, there IS a better state to live in: and that is the state of contentment.

We love the great Bible verse that says, “I can do all things through Christ.” But that promise is NOT in the context of winning the big game or landing that dream job. It has to do with contentment. Paul was in prison when he wrote, **“ I know how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.”** (Philippians 4:12-13)

So don't love the world – the lusts of the flesh, or the lust of the eyes. But then John adds a third desire to avoid:

**4. BEING HUMBLE IS BETTER THAN PRIDE.** He writes, **“The pride of one's possessions ... is from the world.”** I don't really think “pride of possessions” is the best translation. It's the word *bios*, which means life. So I think the idea is warning against the arrogance that comes from a certain lifestyle. It could be pride over fame, or fortune. It means being conceited about the things you do have. In our virtual world we have a new category of fame – there are people who live a certain lifestyle and are considered social media influencers. And success is judged by the number of followers they have. People determine their self-worth based on the number of followers or subscribers. Do you know who has the most Instagram followers after Instagram itself? It's Cristiano Ronaldo, the famous soccer player, with 254 Million. And the star of every show now has only one actor – me. It says something about our culture that the most prolific photographs is the selfie.

The Bible says to humble yourself in the sight of the Lord. And he will lift you up. This is a very interesting principle in the word of God. The way up is down, and the way down is up. What that means is that if you go through life exalting yourself, God will make sure that you're put down. Where do we see the first example of someone promoting themselves? It's in Isaiah 14 when Lucifer wasn't content with his position as an angel. He wanted to take over God's throne. He said, “I will exalt myself above the Most High. I'm going all the way to the

top!” But God said, “Sorry, Lucifer, but you’re goin’ down. And you’re going to keep going down until you end up forever in hell.”

Now think about these three desires: the desire of the flesh; the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life. That’s exactly the strategy that Satan employed in the Garden of Eden when he tempted Eve. Listen to Genesis 3:6 **“The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it.”** It was good to look at – the lust of the eyes. It was good for food – the lust of the flesh; and Satan promised she would become like God – the pride of life.” Satan hasn’t changed his strategy in thousands of years. He’s still using these things of the world to make Christians stumble.

**5. LIVING FOREVER IS BETTER THAN PERISHING.** John wrote in verse 17, **“The world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.”**

Did you catch that? All the fads and fashions of this world are passing away – they are only temporary. They are replaced with the next and newest fads and fashions. When I was in High School all the guys who were cool would wear pastel-colored shirts, with pants that rode above the ankles and socks that matched the shirt – and penny loafers with a penny in the slot.

I can remember when my girls were teenagers, they just HAD to have a pair of Doc Martens. They were soon out of style. Of course, according to my granddaughters, they’re back in. But they’ll be out of fashion again.

I asked some of my Facebook friends some of the trends that were popular when they were teenagers and I got a ton of good answers. Some of the fads and fashions that have passed away are shoulder pads for women, mullet haircuts for guys, big teased hair from the 80’s, fanny packs, the macarena, Bedazzled jeans, Leisure suits, Crocs, Jelly sandals, blue eye-shadow, Bell bottoms, tight rolled jeans, fidget spinners, harem pants, ducktail haircuts, and lots of petticoats.

In 2010 Vine videos were the hottest thing, and they aren’t even around anymore. And someday in the future, people will be saying, can you

remember back in the time when Tik Tok and Instagram were the hottest things?

And the popular philosophy of the world is passing away. Do any of you remember the name of the product that used this advertising slogan in the 19060's. **“You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can get!”** That would be Schlitz Beer. I guess they grabbed for a little too much gusto because their company went out of business and was sold in 1982.

But that's the attitude of the world – YOLO – you only live once -this life is all there is so live it up! But Jesus spoke of another world – the Kingdom of Heaven. He told Pontius Pilate, “My kingdom is not of THIS world.”

And this world is not our home. We're just passing through. So, you have a choice between the fads and fashions of this world, or loving and serving the Creator of the Universe. The world is passing away, but the one who does the will of the Father will live forever.

**CONCLUSION:** About twenty-years ago, I went on a construction mission trip with a group of guys from our church led by John Mark Bellington. We went to Manaus, Brazil and we built a church building on a foundation that had been poured. While we were there, we took a boat ride on the mighty Amazon River. By the way, there has been an Amazon long before you started ordering stuff online. It is a huge river – in terms of volume it is the largest river in the world. During the wet season, it is 24 miles across at its widest point. Manaus is 900 miles from the Atlantic Ocean and it is where the Rio Negro flows into the Amazon. For many miles these two rivers flow together without mixing the waters. It's amazing to see. There are fresh water dolphins that inhabit the river, too. The rivers flow alongside each for fifty miles until finally the muddy Amazon absorbs the Rio Negro and they become one color.

That's a powerful illustration of what happens to some Christians. Jesus saved us out of this world, and we are to be separate from the world – like the two rivers. But there are many Christians who have lost their identity, and they have absorbed the habits, lifestyles, and vocabulary of the world until it's hard to tell them apart from unbelievers. In Romans



12:2 the Bible says, **“Don’t be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”**

In Greek mythology there were dangerous sea creatures called Sirens. These were half-women half-birds who would play or sing such enticing music that sailors would steer toward them and die as their ship crashed upon the jagged rocks. These sirens appear in two myths, *Homer’s Odyssey* and the story of *Jason and the Argonauts*. If you’re not really into Greek mythology, maybe you saw the cartoon movie, *Ice Age Continental Drift*. Manny the Woolly Mammoth (whose voice is Ray Romano) had to steer their iceberg past some creatures disguised as beautiful females – they borrowed this idea from Greek mythology. But back to Greek Mythology - when Odysseus sailed by the sirens, he filled all his sailors’ ears with beeswax so they couldn’t hear the music. He had his crew tie him to the mast as they sailed past the sirens. He was so tormented by the music of the sirens that he tried his best to break free and swim to shore. He was almost driven mad by their enticing songs.

But in the story of Jason and the Argonauts, Jason used a different strategy to avoid the call of the sirens. They had a talented musician onboard named Orpheus. While they sailed past the sirens, Orpheus played music on his lyre that was louder and more beautiful, so that the sailors paid no attention to the music of the sirens.

The world is still playing its siren music trying to attract us toward what it claims is the pleasures of sin. But it is a dangerous song because sin always leads to death. And most of us can think of Christians who have ended up with their faith shipwreck on the jagged rocks of sin.

But our response to the siren call of the world should not be that Odysseus who tied himself to the mast. He was tormented. Instead Jason and his sailors were listening to another song – a song so beautiful that they didn’t even hear the song of the wicked sirens. As followers of Jesus, we’re listening to a new song, and it’s so beautiful and captivating that the song of the world no longer appeals to us.