

## **Two Mutually Exclusive Loves** **1 John 2:12-17**

Flipping a coin is an example of a mutually exclusive event. When the coin is tossed, it will land with either the heads or the tails side up. Both sides can't be up at the same time. Both outcomes cannot happen simultaneously. Likewise, loving the world and loving God are mutually exclusive commitments. Both can't happen at the same time. When love of the world is present, love of God is absent. When love of God is present, love of the world is absent. Given that the two are mutually exclusive, the question is, which one is evident in our life? This is a very important question because the answer demonstrates whether or not we are enjoying fellowship with God.

John writes for the purposes that we might enjoy fellowship with God and other believers and that we might then experience complete joy. His message is that if we are to enjoy fellowship with God, we must be like Him.

In 1 John 1:5-3:10, John addresses the holiness of God and our need to walk in holiness if we are to enjoy fellowship with Him. In 1 John 1:6-7, John addresses our need to walk in holiness. In 1 John 1:8-2:2, John addresses the hindrance of sin to our fellowship and the provisions of Christ to restore us to fellowship with a holy God. In 1 John 2:3-27, John presents

### **Evidence of our fellowship with God:**

#### **Evidence Exhibit #1- Obedience to God's commands in general (1 John 2:3-6)**

We know that we know God and that His love has been perfected in us when we are keeping His commands. We have the assurance that we are abiding in Christ when we are walking as Jesus walked—when our life is like His.

#### **Evidence Exhibit #2-Obedience to God's command to love one another (1 John 2:7-11)**

When we are part of God's family and in fellowship with Him, we will characteristically love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Before we look at the third evidence John presents, we need to consider John's "pastoral parenthesis" in 1 John 2:12-14.

#### **Pastoral Parenthesis: God is at work in His children at all levels of spiritual maturity (2:12-14)**

John doesn't intend to give his readers the impression that he thinks they are completely in the dark; that he doubts whether or not they are genuine Christians. John believes most of his readers are in fact believers who possess a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. There is evidence in 1 John that his original readers are dabbling in the shadows of darkness and when they are, they are at that moment out of fellowship.

However, in the overall picture, there are things John observes that convince him that a new day is dawning in their lives—that they are beginning to give evidence of the profession they are making to know God. He sees evidence of their living in the light at all levels of spiritual maturity.

As John expresses his confidence that his original readers have the real thing, that they are believers, he splits them up into three different groups and addresses each group separately two different times. In each address, John uses a different tense in the Greek and a different Greek word for the word translated children. While there are many different ideas as to the significance of John's change of tense and his change of Greek words, it seems most plausible that the changes are stylistic and that the reason he writes once and then again is that what he has to say is important. John demonstrates here his pastoral heart. He wants his readers to know that he is convinced that the majority of them belong to the family. They are at different levels of maturity, which he reflects in his address in verses 12-14, but they have the real thing, they are genuine believers.

The three groups represent three stages of spiritual maturity. There are children who represent newborn Christians or new believers. There are young men who represent more mature believers who have learned to overcome the evil one. There are fathers who represent stable believers who possess a significant depth in their knowledge of God and communion with Him. John is positive about what he says to each of these three groups.

John addresses the new believers as children in recognition of the fact that they have been born spiritually into God's family. They are God's children. He writes to affirm that they have been forgiven of sins on account of His name. The forgiveness they have received isn't based on their merit, but on the merit of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

John writes a second time about the newborn believers having come to know God as their Father. Having been reborn, they have begun to know what it is to be able to fellowship with Him. Even though this is the most spiritually immature of the three groups John addresses, they can be sure that their sins are forgiven and that they know the Father personally. Their spiritual immaturity does not exclude them from the opportunity to enjoy fellowship with God.

About the fathers, John writes the same thing both times he addresses them—"They have known Him who is from the beginning." The mature believes, those who are older in the faith, have developed a deep knowledge of "Him who is from the beginning" which is probably a reference to Jesus Christ. This mature knowledge of Christ gives these believers the ability to experience communion or fellowship with God on a deeper level and it brings stability to their walk with God.

About the young men, John writes of their having overcome the evil one. This group is younger in the faith and not yet fully mature spiritually. They are commended because they have overcome the evil one. They have encountered the enemy, successfully resisted him, and experienced victory.

The second time John addresses the young men, he commends them for their spiritual strength. He commends them for the fact that God's Word is abiding in them. He commends them for having overcome the evil one. The young men have God's Word abiding in them to which the Spirit of God is able to grab a hold of and use to strengthen them and enable them onto the path of victory.

Porter writes in summary of these verses- "If you're part of the family, you experience God's work in your life—at your maturity level. The experience won't be the same for everyone. All members of the family will experience God's Work in their life at some level. Whatever level of maturity we may be on, we can enjoy fellowship with Him, if we abide in Him and walk as He walked."

### **Evidence Exhibit #3-Not loving the world or the things in it (2:15-17)**

#### **The command: Stop loving the world and the things in it**

John uses the present tense imperative with the Greek term μή to prohibit the continuation of the action of loving the world and the things in it that is currently in progress among his readers. He essentially says, "Stop it."

No matter how far believers have advanced in their spiritual maturity, there is the danger of misdirecting their love to the wrong object. The world is always the wrong object of a believer's love.

What does John mean by the world in this context?

#### **The world is the ordered system of evil ruled by Satan that opposes God and encourages people to leave Him out of their lives**

#### **The reasons for this command:**

##### **If anyone is loving the world, he is not loving the Father**

"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Love for God is not the motivating reality in the life of the person who loves the world—love for the world is what motivates such a person. When a person's commitment is to the world, he or she cannot at the same time demonstrate a commitment to the Father. Love for the Father and love for the world are mutually exclusive. A choice has to be made for one or the other, but a choice can't be made for both at the same time. When a choice is made for either God or the world—the opposite choice is excluded or left out.

##### **The things of the world don't have God as their source**

"For everything in the world...comes not from the Father but from the world." Nothing from the world system comes from God. All of the things of the world seek to replace God and leave Him out.

## **Three things we find in the world, all of which the believer is to stop loving:**

### **1. The desires of the flesh**

The Greek word John uses here translated “cravings” in the NIV is not always used of a negative desire. However, when combined with the word translated “sinful man” in the NIV and better translated flesh, it is referring to sinful desires. What are the desires of the flesh? When people hear the word desire and flesh in the same sentence, they quickly apply it to one kind of wrong desire—lust, sexual desire for someone other than one’s spouse. While the desires of the flesh certainly include sinful sexual desires, John is here warning us of a much broader danger. The desires of the flesh are any desires to do and pursue what I want out of life regardless of what God wants. They are the desires to do my own thing, to put forth my best effort to attain what I want in life, to pursue my dreams and goals, while in the process leaving God out of the picture.

Hiebert defines lust of the flesh as, “Varied cravings of fallen human nature pursued in the interest of self in self-sufficient independence from God.”

When we totally leave God out and live our life consumed with ourselves, with what we want, and with our efforts to get where we want to be, our love is directed to the world and not God.

The following lyrics from the song entitled “My Way” capture what John means by the desires of the flesh:

And now, the end is here  
And so I face the final curtain  
My friend, I'll say it clear  
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain  
I've lived a life that's full  
I traveled each and ev'ry highway  
And more, much more than this, I did it my way

Regrets, I've had a few  
But then again, too few to mention  
I did what I had to do and saw it through without exemption  
I planned each charted course, each careful step along the byway  
And more, much more than this, I did it my way

Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew  
When I bit off more than I could chew  
But through it all, when there was doubt  
I ate it up and spit it out  
I faced it all and I stood tall and did it my way

I've loved, I've laughed and cried  
I've had my fill, my share of losing  
And now, as tears subside, I find it all so amusing  
To think I did all that  
And may I say, not in a shy way,  
"Oh, no, oh, no, not me, I did it my way"

For what is a man, what has he got?  
If not himself, then he has naught  
To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels  
The record shows I took the blows and did it my way!

Yes, it was my way

**Lyrics by Frank Sinatra**

## **2. The desires of the eyes**

This deals with the desire to acquire what we see whether it be something we see physically or something we see it in our minds eye through mental visualization. We see something. Our seeing it causes us to want it, to desire what we see. Our desire motivates us to take what we see. It is obvious that the lust of the eyes refers to anything we see, desire, and take that we should not have. For example, Eve saw, desired, and took the fruit God prohibited her from eating (Genesis 3:6). Achan saw, desired, and took the treasures of the enemy that were devoted the Lord and therefore were not to be taken for himself (Joshua 7:20-21), and David saw, desired, and took another man's wife for himself (2 Samuel 11:2).

While John clearly has these kinds of things in mind, I think the concept of the desire of the eyes is even broader. Sometimes the things we see and acquire for ourselves are good or neutral things in and of themselves. For example, it is not necessarily wrong to see, want, and acquire a car or computer. However, if we are not careful, we can slip into the trap of loving, wanting and taking what we see in place of loving God. Our life can be so consumed by the desire to obtain the things we see around us that what God wants of us is pushed out.

## **3. The pride of life**

Whereas the previous two things of the world that John warns us not to love are inward relating to what a person desires, this last thing is outward. It relates to what a person has or professes to have that produces a proud overconfidence.

The NIV translates this third thing of the world as “the boasting of what he has and does.” This is a pretty good translation, but I believe the NET Bible captures it even better as “arrogance produced by material possessions.”

The literal Greek translation of this third thing of the world is “The pride of life.” The word translated literally “of life” is the same Greek word rendered “material possessions” in 1 John 3:17. I believe what John means by the pride of life then is the tendency to boast proudly that one has enough in the form of material possessions to provide for himself without God’s help. The pride of life leads one to boast before God- “I have all I need with the material possessions I have amassed for myself—I don’t need you.” While most who struggle with the arrogance produced by material possessions won’t come and out say this, the way they live reflects their proud attitude. I think one of the key indicators of our having fallen into the arrogance produced by material possessions is when prayers for our daily bread are absent. The absence of our prayers recognizing and looking to God as the provider of all we need and the absence of our giving thanks to Him reflects our “we can do it ourselves” attitude.

### **Another reason to love God and not love the world—the world won’t last (2:17)**

#### **The world and the things it leads us to desire are passing away**

When we focus on the things of this world, we are focusing on that which is temporary. None of the things of this world have staying power. As Chuck Swindoll has so aptly observed, “There aren’t any U-hauls being pulled behind hearses.” We can’t take any of the things of the world with us. All that is in the world will decay, deteriorate, and die. All that is in the world will get stains, fade, or get taken away from us—none of the things in the world will last.

Hiebert writes, “However strong their present appeal, the lusts of the world offer no lasting satisfaction and carry in themselves the seeds of their own deterioration. This process is now operative in the lives of individuals, but one day this world system of evil will be swept off the scene in cataclysmic judgment at the return of Jesus Christ.”

#### **Those characterized by doing God’s will abide forever**

The believer in Jesus Christ will characteristically, though not perfectly, do the will of God. The one who characteristically does the will of God, thereby demonstrating the transformation brought to the life of the person who trusts in Christ, will abide forever. The question is, “Why would people who will abide forever want to cling to what is passing away?” Given that we will abide forever, it only makes sense that we should also live for that which lasts. The true solution for the craving we have for permanence and satisfaction in life, for complete joy comes not by pursuing the fleeting desires of the world, but in doing the will of God. Our full love, devotion, allegiance, and commitment should be to the One who gives us abiding life, not to a world that deteriorates and disappoints.

We say we are walking in the light and enjoying fellowship with God. Is our claim true? Let's examine the evidence. What is the object of our love? If it is the world, our claim is false. If it is God, then our claim is true. Remember, this is an either/or issue, not both and. We are dealing with mutually exclusive loves. Both can't co-exist in a person. We can't pursue the world's desires and be in fellowship with God at the same time. Which is it for us? How will we choose to live?

Will we live to satisfy our own desires? Will we do things our way? Will we live for greed and materialism, being consumed by our drive to acquire all we see? Will we live with an arrogant attitude thinking we don't need God because of all of the stuff we have accumulated to provide for us and protect us?

Or

Will we live to please God? Will we live, not to acquire temporary things we can see, but for the eternal things God has promised that we can't yet see? Will we live lives of dependence on God, where we include God in everything, as opposed to leaving Him out as the world would lead us to do? Will we live to do the will of God?

Remember, our choice determines the presence or absence of fellowship with God in our life. Remember, our choice determines the presence or absence of complete joy in us.

Which will we choose?

As I was preparing this message, the question that kept coming to mind is, "How can we do anything but love God and demonstrate that love by our obedience to His will given what Jesus Christ has done for us as the demonstration of God's love for us?"

1 John 3:16- "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

1 John 4:10- "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

It is only appropriate that we love and live for God in view of how Jesus loved and died for us. Let's remember his death together through our observance of communion.

As we partake of communion, let's be careful to examine whether or not we are in fellowship with the host of this communion table, the Lord Jesus Christ. Have we been loving the world? If so, we are out of fellowship. The good news is that our fellowship with Him can be restored by confessing our sins. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." God's forgiveness has been made possible by the incredible provision of our Lord Jesus Christ in dying for us.

“And the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Let's remember together His sacrifice for us!