

Do not love the world or anything in the world... (Graziano Crepaldi)

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

Since the beginning of our discipleship walk with Jesus we are faced with the challenge on how we should focus our lives on God and how we should be freed from the pressures of this world and desires that intensively dominated our lives in the past. We have also seen many Christian leaders whom we wanted to be "relevant" to reach their culture by becoming just like the people they wanted to reach and in the process lose their distinctiveness. Paul warned us of this danger in **Romans 12:2**, when he wrote, **"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."** At the end of his life, Paul sadly wrote to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:10), **"For Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."** Even though he had once been Paul's fellow co-worker (Phil. 24) Demas gave in to the temptation of this world. In the last years we have lost valuable workers and friends with great gifts and calling, because they couldn't resist to the attractive offers of this world. The pervasive influence of modern media has made the challenge even bigger. Daily we are bombarded with attractive people telling us that we can't be happy unless we own the product that they are selling or adopt the lifestyle that they are pursuing. As Christians attempt to resist worldliness, they often find themselves tempted to shift to the radical and opposite extreme of the spectrum. The result is a withdrawal from the world and the development of a religious and legalistic worldview to control their carnal impulses. Paul very clearly stated that **"such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Col.2:23)** and therefore are not a real solution for this problem.

Worldliness is an issue of the heart. If your heart is taken by the world, you will love the things of the world. If your heart is invaded by the love of God, you will be drawn to Him and to the things of God. The only way that our hearts can be transformed is through a clear and definitive new birth (rebirth). John wrote his letter to warn the believers of his time who claimed they had experienced God, but they still lived in the darkness. Isn't this the situation of the Church today?

In this letter John gives three tests by which the followers of Jesus could evaluate these wrong ideas and by which they could tell whether their own faith was sound or not: the first moral test of obedience; the second relational test of true love for the others; and then a doctrinal test on the truths we believe about Christ.

In 1 John 2:3-6, John challenges us with the statement that authentic faith produces obedience to God's commandments. The disciples that have experienced fastest growth and whom God has been using the most in our teams were those that have committed themselves to be faithful to God and see Jesus as their King and not just as their Savior. It seems too easy to say but the reality is that God likes to use those who are willing to do what He says and desire to follow Him despite their difficult circumstances and even personal problems.

In 1 John 2:7-11, we find the second test: authentic faith is manifested in the love for others. We are always very impressed by people who are able to forgive or give up their rights to see relationships really restored. In our western nations we have observed many believers running away from relationships and abandoning communities. They love others as long as this is convenient to them or as long as they could receive some sort of reward for their efforts and then they drop valuable friendships when struggles come. Jesus gave us a powerful tool to heal relationship sin Mt. 18:15-17 that most Christians (and leaders) refuse to use. Pride, jealousy, shame and religiosity move many people to just wait or ask God hoping that He would create the perfect circumstance so that they can humble themselves. Is this real love?

In 1 John 2:15-17 we see that the authentic faith is not of this world, but it is founded only in the truth about Christ (1 John 2:18-27). John is making a sharp clear line, with no compromises: If you love the world, you do not love the Father. The word "love" (in Greek agape) indicates a commitment, not a feeling and is a command! The only way that you can fight the love of the world is to maintain and grow in your love for the Father. Have you noticed that so few believers realized that their lives are full of worldliness? What is worldliness? John also uses the word to refer to the evil, organized system under Satan, which operates through unbelieving people who are God's enemies. In 1 John 5:19 we read **"We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."** Jesus told us that the world (with ungodly thoughts, attitudes, motives, values, and goals) hated both Him and those who follow Him (John 15:18-19). The world does not seek to promote God's glory and His Kingdom or to submit to His authority. This is the reason why we must not love the world. John highlights 3 different aspects of "all that is in the world" that we should fight:

1. The Lust of the Flesh (Hedonismus) is not the love of the Father but the world. Lust is a strong desire or impulse and the flesh refers to our fallen nature, which is not eliminated at salvation. The lust of the flesh includes any strong desire or inclination of our fallen nature, including

sexual sins, but also all self-seeking attitudes that we are born with. This way of living is also known as Hedonismus, an ancient philosophy founded to which the highest ethical principle is the pursuit of permanent individual physical and emotional pleasure and happiness. Many natural desires are legitimate if they are kept under control and used for which God designed them. The desires for food, companionship, sex and security are legitimate when we keep them within God's limits and when we do not allow them to take the place of God in our hearts, but they become sinful when we seek to fulfill themselves in selfish and ungodly ways. The false god called "freedom" is one of the main stronghold of modern society and an other expression of the lust of flesh that a disciple of Jesus would need to stop serving. True freedom is found in God alone! We have never been so free as we became ever since we bound ourselves to Christ alone (as Paul was used to define himself in Rom. 1:1).

2. The Lust of the eyes (Materialism) is not the love of the Father but the world. This term is pointing out to the sinful desires of greed and covetousness. You desire that which you do not have, but which others may have. This way of thinking leads to Materialism (a doctrine where material success and progress are the highest values in life). Through our eyes, the world appeals to us to find satisfaction in the superficial, which never can satisfy our longing for love. "Buy a new home and you will be happy!" "Find a beautiful woman (or a handsome man) and you will be satisfied." "Get the perfect job and have plenty of money and you will be ok." If we look at the lives of the rich and famous, none of these things deliver what they promise.

3. The Pride of life (Humanism) is not the love of the Father but the world. The lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes refer to the desire to have what you do not have, the boastful pride of life refers to sinful pride over what you do have. The blessings of the past can easily turn into the curses for the future. The desire to be better than others give us a sense of accomplishment. Of course we are called to be good stewards of God's gifts, but it's easy to forget that He gave you everything that you have (1 Cor. 4:7) and to give room to pride is causing us to become self-center. This is the core of the philosophy of Humanism that placed man at the center of the universe. The main reason why Satan was thrown out of Heaven was self-generated pride and exactly the same issue caused Adam and Eve to turn their back to God and lose the garden of Eden.

How do we maintain our love for the Father? If you love God, you will love what he wills. It is empty talk to say I love God but I don't love what God loves. We love our Father in Heaven and therefore we find pleasure in obey Him, do His will and our life is our worship. Jesus said, "**If you love Me, you will keep My commandments**" (John 14:15) or "**If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love**" (John 15:10). In 1 John 2:17 we are reminded that the promises of God have always an eternal perspective. Nobody sets up a house in a sinking sand. No reasonable person would lay up treasure where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal, would he? The world is passing away! If you love the world or the things in the world, you will anyway lose them at death. If you've tasted what it means to have a heart for God, but your love for Him has simply grown cold and weak you need to ask the Holy Spirit to rekindles love and passion for Jesus. It is an amazing privilege to be able to live our life in light for God and be part of His kingdom! Nothing in all the world is more important than experiencing love for God in your heart.