

STUDY GUIDE

FORBIDDEN LOVE

1 John 2:15-17

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world.”

Scripture Text

1 John 2:15-17

15 Do not love the world nor 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 and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

Overview

John writes to believers (“little children”) who have been delivered from the power of this world. Yet the world continues to compete for their love and loyalty. This passage is a solemn, fatherly warning: the world is not a winsome friend with whom we flirt, but a formidable adversary we must resist. Our affections must be exclusively set upon Christ.

Key Theme: The Christian must not love the world-system under Satan’s rule, because that love is incompatible with the love of the Father and ends in eternal loss.

I. THE MEANING — What Is “the World”?

John repeats the word “world” (Greek: *kosmos*) six times in three verses for emphasis. Understanding what he means is essential.

(a) Its Diversity — How the Word Is Used

The Greek word *kosmos* can mean:

- **God’s creation** — “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him” (John 1:10).
- **Humanity** — “For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16).
- **A large group of people** — “Look, the world has gone after Him” (John 12:19).

Important: In 1 John 2:15-17, John does **not** mean God’s creation, all people, or a crowd. God loves the world of men, and we are commanded to imitate Him (Eph. 5:1).

(b) Its Distinction — The Specific Meaning Here

Here *kosmos* refers to the **system underneath Satan’s rule** — the sphere of spiritual darkness, the domain of the evil one.

Supporting Scriptures:

- “The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving...” (2 Cor. 4:4)
- “The whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” (1 John 5:19)
- “If the world hates you, know it hated Me before it hated you.” (John 15:18-19)

- “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the forces of this darkness...” (Eph. 6:12)

This demonic government peddles poison under the guise of pleasure. It stands behind counterfeit religions, illicit industries, and every God-forbidden sin. Yet it is already judged: “The ruler of this world has been judged” (John 16:11; 12:31).

Discussion & Reflection

1. How does distinguishing “the world” as Satan’s system (rather than creation or people) change the way you read this command?
2. Where do you see the ideology of this dark government at work in culture today?
3. Jesus prayed that His disciples would remain *in* the world but be kept from the evil one (John 17:15). How does that prayer shape your daily engagement with culture?

II. THE MANDATE — The Command and Its Force

John’s tone is warm and affectionate—like a father pleading with his children to avoid what will destroy them.

(a) The Command

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world...” (2:15)

The Greek uses a present imperative—a command with continual force: “Do not continue to love the world” or “Never again love the world.”

The love in view is *agapaō*—the highest form of love, the love the Spirit pours into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). That love belongs exclusively to God (Matt. 22:37).

Why we must not love the world:

- We have been delivered from it (Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9).
- The world hates Jesus; it is wicked to love what hates the King of love.
- Its value is nothing compared to the surpassing worth of Christ (Matt. 13:44). To love the world is to trade the diamond for excrement.

“Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord...” (2 Cor. 6:17)

(b) The Characteristics — What the World Offers

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” (2:16)

1. The Lust of the Flesh

Greek: *epithymia* — a deep craving or impulse. “Flesh” here is not the physical body but the corrupt Adamic nature—self-focused, sin-soaked, desperately sick (Jer. 17:9). It includes sexual sin but is broader: any attitude, speech, or action that opposes God’s law and exceeds the limits of what is good and righteous.

“Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin...” (James 1:14-15)

2. The Lust of the Eyes

The intentional gaze that awakens and arouses sinful desire. David’s prolonged look at Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2) and Eve’s assessment of the forbidden tree (Gen. 3:6) illustrate it. Wisdom calls us to keep our eyes fixed straight ahead (Prov. 4:25).

3. The Boastful Pride of Life

Self-deification, self-exaltation, self-absorption. Pride is the root of all other sins and was Satan’s foremost attribute (Isa. 14:14).

Note: All three appear in Satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Luke 4): bread (lust of the flesh), the kingdoms shown to Him (lust of the eyes), and the pinnacle of the temple (pride of life). Jesus prevailed—on our behalf.

(c) The Charge — The Test of Genuine Love

"...If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (2:15)

John's blunt statement functions as a diagnostic. Continual love for the world proves the absence of the Father's love. Regeneration changes desires and tastes. What we once loved is abandoned because a new love has come.

Christians can be tempted by the world, but they cannot again become its owned citizens. God's nature and the Holy Spirit dwell within them. If a person returns to the world as Demas did (2 Tim. 4:10), the love of the Father was never in them.

"Everyone who has been born of God does not [practice] sin, because His seed abides in him..." (1 John 3:9)

Discussion & Reflection

4. Which of the three characteristics—lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or pride of life—most frequently tempts you? Why?
5. How does the example of Jesus' victory over the same three temptations encourage you in the fight?
6. John says continual love for the world shows the love of the Father is not present. How should this warning affect the way we examine our own hearts and the hearts of those we disciple?

III. THE MOTIVATION — Why We Refuse the World

John gives two clear, persuasive motivations.

(a) Its Immense Losses

"And the world is passing away, and also its lusts..." (2:17a)

Judas gained thirty pieces of silver and lost his soul. Demas went after the present world and left no lasting fruit. The Prodigal's husks ran out. Every lust, every sensual gaze, every proud achievement has an expiration date.

"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:26)

R.G. Lee's famous sermon title captures the truth: "Payday Someday." God does not always settle accounts at the end of every day, but in the end He pays. The world's promises are short-lived pleasures that turn into forever nightmares.

There is no greater loss than a soul. It is a forever loss—second by second, millennium to millennium, without end.

(b) Its Promised Gains

"...But the one who does the will of God abides forever." (2:17b)

The will of God is that we believe in His Son (John 6:40). Those who do the will of God receive an inheritance that never fades, joys that never diminish, and a glory that is eternal.

Moses chose mistreatment with the people of God over the passing pleasures of sin, regarding the reproach of Christ as greater riches than the treasures of Egypt (Heb. 11:25-26). Paul counted everything as loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ (Phil. 3:8).

No one who dies in Christ dies regretfully. All who die without Him do. The incentive is simple and overwhelming: **Christ is infinitely better.**

Discussion & Reflection

7. What temporary gains of the world are you most tempted to value? What eternal gains of Christ do you need to set before your eyes more deliberately?
8. How does the certainty that “the world is passing away” change the way you spend time, money, and energy?
9. Moses and Paul both counted worldly treasure as loss compared to Christ. What would it look like for you to make a similar calculation this week?

Personal Application

John closes the section by pressing the question of ownership: Where is your love aimed? What consumes your time, resources, thoughts, and appetites? These things testify to what love owns you.

1. **Examine:** Honestly assess the direction of your affections this past month. What has most occupied your thoughts and desires?
2. **Repent:** Where the world has gained ground, confess it specifically and turn from it.
3. **Replace:** Set your mind on the superior worth of Christ. Meditate on one of the passages listed below each day this week.
4. **Guard:** Identify one practical boundary (media, spending, relationships, ambition) that will help you refuse the world’s pull.

Memory Verses

Primary: 1 John 2:15-17

Supporting:

- Colossians 1:13 — transferred from the domain of darkness
- John 15:18-19 — the world’s hatred of those who belong to Christ
- Matthew 16:26 — the unprofitability of gaining the world and losing the soul
- Hebrews 11:25-26 — Moses’ choice of lasting treasure
- Philippians 3:8 — counting all things loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ

Closing Prayer Focus

Ask the Father to deepen your love for His Son so that the world’s counterfeit pleasures lose their power. Pray for a clear sight of the world’s expiration date and of the eternal inheritance reserved for those who do His will. Ask for grace to love Christ exclusively—and to help others do the same.

“What preserves me from loving the world? Loving Christ with all my heart.”

— Amen.