



Parkway Fellowship

Livin' the Dream • This Is the Way • 1 John 2:15-17; 3:16-18; 4:2-3; 5:3 • 01/26/2020

MAIN POINT

In Christ our sins have been forgiven, empowering us to love the Father wholeheartedly.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is something you pursued when you were a teenager (a sport, mastery of an instrument, a relationship, etc.)?

What about now? What is something you are pursuing right now?

How have your pursuits impacted your actions?

Is there anything wrong with pursuing your dreams? Explain.

God gives us passions that often lead to active pursuits. He uses those pursuits for His good, too. However, our pursuits can lead us away from God's purposes if we don't keep the proper perspective. In this week's message, we were reminded that when we chase after worldly things, the carrot is always moving. It makes promises it won't deliver, and even if you catch it, it's just a carrot. But when we start living God's dream instead of the dreams of the world, everything changes.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read 1 John 2:15-17.

What does it mean to love the world?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. What insight does this passage give you into the differences between loving the world and loving the Father? How is it possible for you to not love the world?

In 1 John 2, the term world refers to unbelieving society, seen as a rebel order hostile to God. Viewed as an evil system, organized under Satan's control, the world should not be loved, because it tempts believers away from God and into sin. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33), and faith in Him assures us of victory over the hostility and power of the world controlled by Satan.

John lists three typical features of the sinful world. What are they, and why are they such affronts to God?

The world and those who follow worldly desires are temporary. Permanence belongs only to those who do the will of God. Genuine love for God and others will lead us to reject the sinful appeals of the world. Do our actions reflect the world's or God's values? We should resist the lure of the world and follow God's will to love. In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul gives us additional insight into how we say no to the things of the world.

| Have a volunteer read 1 John 3:16-18.

Why is true love sacrificial in nature? What kinds of things does love require us to sacrifice?

Why is true love always demonstrated and not just verbalized?

Because love is defined by Jesus, we know that true love is both sacrificial and substantive; it is costly and demonstrated. When we love another, we are willing to sacrifice our comfort, desires, and preferences for their sake. And because we are, this kind of love is more than just an expression; it is a solid demonstration of an inner condition.

How does this understanding of love run contrary to what the world thinks of as love?

| Ask a volunteer to read 1 John 4:1-3.

Who comes to mind when you hear the word "discernment"? Why?

Why is the nature of Jesus "ground zero" for determining whether a teaching is truth or a lie?

What are some distortions of the nature of Jesus we still hear today?

Christianity rises or falls based on what we believe—and what we teach others—about Jesus. John gave us a Christ-centered test by which to evaluate a person's beliefs and teachings. Stated simply, "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God."

The Jesus revealed in the Gospels is clearly the Son of God who lived among the Jews, was crucified, and died a real death. Jesus also experienced a physical resurrection on the third day after His crucifixion. This resurrection confirmed everything He taught and showed that His life and death were approved by God. Therefore, when you want to test the validity of a group, find out what that group teaches about Jesus.

| Ask a volunteer to read 1 John 5:3.

Throughout 1 John, John applied three tests to those who claimed to be Christians and have knowledge of God: the tests of obedience, love, and belief. In the opening verses of chapter 5, the apostle brought together these main characteristics of those born of God—belief in Jesus as the Christ, love for God and for one another, and obedience to God's commands.

In your own words, how are faith, love, and obedience intertwined?

Defined by God's Word, "Living the dream" involves obeying God's commands, yet most people think living the dream means living in contrast to God's commands. How would you explain to someone why following the way of the Lord is the best way to live?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In this week's message, we learned the following ways to "live the dream": read the current Best Seller (The Bible), lock arms with people, listen to the right voices, and make some change. Which of these stands out to you the most personally? Why?

What is one practical step of application you need to take this week in response to this study? How can this group help you in that?

PRAYER

Thank God that Jesus made the way for you to live the very best possible life. Pray that as you are tempted by the things of the world this week you will remember your identity in Christ and claim God's power to fight back against those temptations in faith, love, and obedience.

COMMENTARY

| 1 John 2:15-17

The world in this context refers to the attitudes and values that disregard God or are blatantly against God. It certainly does not refer to God's natural creation or even humanity (we are to love the people in the world for whom Christ died, as God does, John 3:16), but to that part of human affairs that are under the authority of the devil. We love the people of the world, but we do not love the sinful attitudes and values they may embrace. If we love the world, we are not loving God. We cannot love the world and love God at the same time. This interpretation is strengthened by James 4:4, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God."

The reason we are not to love the world is that the world's values are in opposition to God. The desires of the flesh are the sinful interests and desires that draw us away from God. The desires of the eyes refers to sinful desires that corrupt us. The pride in possessions refers to the arrogance and pride that can overtake us as we try to "get ahead of the Joneses" and when we rely on ourselves rather than God for our material possessions and worldly positions. These values are foolish for two reasons. First, they do not come from the Father. Therefore, they interfere with our fellowship with the Father. Second, we are all going to die, and what we are living for will come to nothing.

| 1 John 3:16-18

In stark contrast to this unspeakable hatred is Jesus' remarkable love. We can understand what love is by looking at Jesus' example. He laid down his life for us. We ought to be prepared to do the same for one another. While the necessity of laying down our lives for one another is rare, the necessity of helping meet one another's needs is not. The true test of a Christian's love is not his words (loving with words or tongue) but his willingness to sacrifice for the sake of his brother ... to love with actions and in truth.

| 1 John 4:2-3

Spirit can be interpreted in one of three ways:

1. The spirit behind the prophet who is speaking (many false prophets have gone out into the world), in which case it would refer to the Holy Spirit or to demons, depending on whether the prophet was of God.

2. The prophet himself, “spirit” being a figure of speech, a metaphor, meaning “the prophet.”
3. The message itself, “spirit” being a figure of speech, a metaphor, meaning “the message.”

All three of these interpretations are possible. Most Bible teachers prefer option 1 or option 2 because the test given for the spirits in the next verse seems personal (every spirit that acknowledges). Each of the options tells us not to automatically believe anyone who comes to the church to preach or teach. We are to listen carefully to their treatment of Jesus. Apparently, false prophets in the church at Ephesus were denying that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. This test was specifically set up for this situation: Does the teacher accept Jesus’ full humanity and full deity. If not, his entire teaching is to be rejected.

This is not the only test a teacher must pass. An eloquent teacher of God’s Word might agree to the divinity and humanity of Jesus, but have other things so out of bounds in his theology that he still might qualify as a false prophet. Jesus himself said that not everyone who called him “Lord” would enter the kingdom.

In this context, the person who acknowledges or confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God. Those who don’t are the spirit of the Antichrist, which John had already warned his readers about (2:18-27; see 2 John 7). Every teacher belongs in one of the two categories: true prophet of the Word or Antichrist.

| 1 John 5:3

As a genuine mark of a born-again heart, love goes both ways: toward God and toward our brothers. This love for God, then, is most clearly demonstrated by obeying him: “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love” (John 15:10). Obedience does not always bring cheer to our hearts, so a profound statement follows: his commands are not burdensome. This stands contrary to what most people think. Certainly, God’s commands are not always the path of least resistance in life. In that sense, it is often easier to disobey God than to obey him. If obeying a command of God is harder than disobeying, the consequences are easier. For example, if it is harder to remain faithful to one’s spouse (obeying the command not to commit adultery) than to give in to passion (disobeying a command), then the consequence of obeying (not committing adultery) will be much easier than the consequences of not obeying (committing adultery). In other words, sin has a price. When it is paid, we see it would have been easier not to have sinned. So in the long run, obeying God’s commands is not burdensome. This is why Jesus could say his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).