

Is Worldliness Seeping into the Church?
Part 2 of "Crucial Questions the Church Needs to Answer"

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The Lord tells us, through the Apostle John...

1 John 2:15 – 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.

To love the world is to be worldly. It means doing things not God's way, but "the world's" way. All Christians should agree that is not a good thing.

But what does this "worldliness" actually look like? On that question, there is not much consensus. In some churches, wearing lipstick is considered worldly because that is not what Christian women do. In other churches, concealing and carrying a handgun to church or anywhere would be considered worldly because, they say, a Christian should trust God, not a Glock.

So, Pastor Dan, what is your point? Well, I don't have any objection to lipstick or Glocks, but I do suspect we often do not really understand what worldliness involves. It seems we like to define "worldliness" as something other people do. Yet, God gives us a pretty sobering warning when he says:

1 John 2:15 – 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.

And friends, this is a warning we often fail to heed. I believe one of the biggest problems today is that worldliness is seeping into the Church, the Evangelical Church, Chisholm Baptist Church, and into our individual lives.

Worldliness is a ditch into which many Christians are falling; yet, because we often misunderstand what "worldliness" involves, we end up going deeper and deeper into the ditch and farther away from the Lord without even realizing there is a problem.

Friends, this morning we want the Lord to help us recognize the love for the things of the world that is infecting our souls. And then we want

him to help us get out of that spiritual ditch and enable us to get back on track in following the Lord. Let's pause and pray that would happen.

1 John 2:15 – 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.

The first question we need to ask is: What is the world we are not to love? That is a question that has received a lot of attention for a long time. In fact, "God so loved the world" (John 3:16) makes it seem a little strange that we are told to not love the world.

The most common explanation is that we, like God, are to love the people in the world. We are to also, many believe, love and care for the natural world God has created. What we are not to love, it is often said, is the world "system" – a system which is in rebellion against God and is built upon the lusts and pride the Apostle John refers to in the next verse...

1 John 2:16 – 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.

Now friends, this is one type of worldliness we need to seek to avoid. Attitudes like "lust" and "pride" do great harm to our souls. Some types of worldliness involve focusing on things which are explicitly anti-God. The Bible gives us many clear warnings against these things.

For example in Galatians 5:19-21, we have this list of what Paul calls "the works of the flesh."

Galatians 5:19-21 - ...sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar.

Folks, those are worldly attitudes and actions. They should not be a part of our lives. Oh, they sometimes are, but the good

thing is that most of the time we recognize that these things should not be a part of our lives. We know they are wrong.

For example, if I am having envious or jealous thoughts, I usually realize that is not good, that it is a sin. By God's grace, I will ask him to forgive me and help me get rid of those thoughts. And friend, if you are struggling with this type of worldliness, that is what you need to do. You need to ask the Lord to forgive you, which he will freely and fully do, if you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior.

And then you need to ask the Lord to help you get rid of those worldly, sinful attitudes and actions in your life. It is important that we avoid and get rid of this type of worldliness.

Yet, there is another type of worldliness which is more subtle, more common and often more dangerous. To recognize this form of "worldliness," we need to ask this question: "What does it mean to love the world?" I think it is helpful to consider what Jesus says...

Luke 14:26 – "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, and even his own life – he cannot be my disciple."

But, Pastor Dan, Jesus doesn't want us to hate our family, does he? No, in fact the New Living Translation reads this way:

Luke 14:26a NLT – "If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else."

In other words, our love for the Lord Jesus needs to be greater than our love for our family. If we love another person more than we love Jesus, we love that individual too much. **Friends, in the same way, it is often okay to love the world, as long as we don't love it too much.**

The book of Genesis tells us everything God made was good. Everything! The problem was not with what God made. The problem was that human beings misused those good things. By "twisting" and "perverting" good things, we

turn them into bad things. This is a very common sin.

The ultimate twisting is idolatry – when we take something that God has created, something which is often in itself good, and then turn it into the object of worship and ultimate affection. This thing then becomes an idol, occupying a place in our lives where only God belongs.

So the problem is often not that we like and enjoy the things in the world (I believe God wants us to do that). Rather, the problem is that we twist and misuse the things of the world and often like them, love them way too much.

Let me give what I think are some pretty obvious examples:

1) **Sex**

Right from the beginning, God made us sexual beings, male and female, whom he commands to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1). That only happens through a sexual relationship. Most of you already knew that.

Sex is a good thing. It is from God. However, the Lord intends that this sexual relationship is to be experienced only by a man and woman married to each other. To have a sexual relationship with a person you are not committed to in that way "twists" what sex was intended for.

That, friends, is not the way of the Lord, but the way of the world – worldliness. And if you are caught up in some type of addiction, where sex is the focus of your life – maybe it's porn or an affair – you are not only misusing a gift God has provided, but you have turned it into an idol – something that completely dishonors the Lord.

2) **Food**

Now, that is for sure a good thing. Our bodies cannot live without its nourishment. As Paul acknowledges:

1 Corinthians 6:13 – "Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food."

But overindulging in food (gluttony), not just eating to live, but living to eat, twists and perverts the wonderful gift God has given to us. It turns it into an idol.

Friend, when the highlight of your week is things that have nourished your body rather than things which have nourished your soul, you are loving food a bit too much.

3) **Nature**

The rest of creation – other than human beings. Genesis 1:26 tells us that we, as human beings, are to have “dominion” over the fish, birds and animals. Having dominion includes both the right to use and the responsibility to care for these other creatures. I believe that is the attitude we should have toward all of the natural world. We are free to use it, but we have to take care of it.

Yet, even though we are to enjoy and appreciate nature, we must never worship it. I am all for an environmentalism that seeks to ensure clean water to drink and clean air to breathe, but ... when environmentalism begins to put the needs of animals and trees ahead of the needs of people; when it, rather than God becomes the focus of one’s life, environmentalism, like any ideology, becomes idolatry.

Folks, these are examples of a form of worldliness about which the Bible warns us. It involves taking good things the Lord has provided and misusing them or loving them too much. Because these things in themselves are good and are not at all anti-God, at least on the surface, we are often unaware of how this form of worldliness can infect and eat away at our souls.

Now, I don’t think this is anything new. We, as Christians, have always struggled with misusing good things God has given us. Instructions the Lord has given us to enjoy and use the things of the world, but do not twist or worship them, have often been ignored. We have frequently fallen into the trap of loving good things too much. We need to do our best to identify when that is happening in our lives.

So, we have two types of worldliness:

The first, which involves embracing attitudes and actions the Bible clearly prohibits – things like the works of the flesh described in Galatians 5.

The second form of worldliness involves misusing good things or loving them too much.

Both are wrong, but it is important to distinguish between the two, especially when it involves our observations about others.

For example, watching a football game – that is a good thing to do, right? Not always! If someone loves watching football too much, it can be very wrong. If watching football games, like maybe eight games a weekend, means ignoring family, friends, God and everything else in life, it is, at least in some ways, just as wrong as watching porn movies. An addiction to watching football!

However, that is something we can usually see much better looking in a mirror than we can out a window. By that, I mean it is usually much easier to detect this type of worldliness, loving good things too much, in my own life than it is in someone else’s.

If my friend Joe tells me he watched a porn movie on Saturday night, I can rightly tell him, “Joe, that was wrong!” However, if he tells me he watched the Wisconsin/BYU football game, it would likely be very judgmental for me to think it was wrong for him to do that.

But, if I look in the mirror and know I should have been working on this sermon rather than watching the football game, then I should admit it was wrong for me to do that.

But, what if Joe has told me he is spending way too much time watching football, and I ask him, “So what did you do last evening?” and he responds, “Well, I watched a couple of football games.” Well, in that case, it is probably good for me to question and challenge Joe about how he is using his time.

OK, as Christians we need to avoid worldliness. That includes loving or embracing ungodly

things that are wrong in themselves. And it involves loving good things too much. Both pull into a dangerous ditch of worldliness which prevents us from following the Lord as we should and will keep us from experiencing his joy in our lives.

Let's explore some aspects of life where this issue of worldliness comes up:

#1 Technology

Christians have a long history of being suspicious of technology. Inventions and innovations have often been considered "worldly." Some of you remember when a TV was known as "The Devil's Box," and was something Christians would certainly not have in their homes.

The group most famous for their opposition to modern technology is the Amish. They refuse to use "worldly technology" such as electricity and motorized vehicles. Certainly, there is no place in the Bible that says we must use those modern inventions, so we should not condemn the Amish for their choices. Yet, I have to wonder why the Amish have objections to 20th century, but not 16th century technology. Why are buggies and printing presses okay? Christians in the New Testament certainly didn't use them.

Friends, the reality is that technology is morally neutral. It can almost always be used for positive purposes – making life better for human beings. Yet, technology can also be misused – used to promote and support evil.

TV is capable of broadcasting both CBC worship services or porn movies. The internet can be used by Christians to spread the gospel or by Islamic terrorists to promote their message. TV and the internet are not the problem. Porn movies and Islamic terrorists are.

Yet, even though technology itself is morally neutral and can often be used for good things, it can also be a trap for addictions and idolatry. It is a good thing that we can love too much.

I think it is rather silly for the Amish to refuse to use electricity. However, if we think that electricity is something we cannot possibly live without, which I suspect some of us do, then we are starting to slip into the ditch of idolatry. There are a lot of folks, including the Amish, who have been able to "live" without electricity. To think that we need anything other than the Lord Jesus to make life worthwhile probably means we have an idol that has been elevated to a place where only God belongs.

In the past fifteen years or so, some of the biggest changes in our society have involved technologies which enable us to communicate more quickly and efficiently. The Internet, Email, Facebook, Smart Phones, Twitter and Skype all fall under this umbrella.

And what could be better than improving communication? That is the key to loving, healthy relationships. Facebook, for example, is a wonderful tool for old friends to reconnect, for grandparents to see pictures of their grandchildren and for us as a church to keep you folks informed about what is happening in our congregation. Incidentally, if you are on Facebook and have not done so, make sure you like our page!

Facebook can, however, be abused. Instead of communicating to build relationships, it can be misused to bully and spew hatred. Yet, even if it is used for good purposes, things like Facebook can pull us away from God when we love them too much.

When you set an alarm so you can wake in the middle of the night to see how many people liked or commented on one of your Facebook posts (some people do that), you have given Facebook a place in your life where it doesn't belong.

That's an addiction, and you have slipped into a God-dishonoring worldliness – not because Facebook is bad, but because you love it too much. Technology is a good thing for which we should be grateful, but when we misuse it or love it too much, it pushes us into the ditch of worldliness.

#2 Activities Which Have Roots in Other Religions

Over the years, I have heard a lot of things characterized as worldly and wrong because of supposedly pagan roots. The list includes: Christmas celebrations, Easter celebrations, Halloween celebrations, Martial Arts classes, using Essential Oils, using various types of Homeopathic Medicine, using African drums in a worship service, Mystical prayer practices, etc.

Now, it is true that almost all of these activities have some connection with a non-Christian religion. Early Christians purposely chose to celebrate the birth of Christ at roughly the same time as the Winter Solstice which had long been a pagan holiday.

It is important that we always be wary of “syncretism” where Christianity is mixed with another religion. We cannot combine true religion (Biblical faith) with false religion. That is why I am very uncomfortable, for example, when a supposed Christian church incorporates a ritual from a non-Christian religion into their worship service. **Yet, we need to ask is it possible to separate a particular activity from any non-Christian roots and make it morally neutral.** Or can that activity even be transformed and used in a way which honors the Lord?

I think the first question’s answer is found in 1 Corinthians 8. Here, Paul addresses one controversy in the church about whether it is OK to eat food that had previously been sacrificed to idols. He instructs every Christian to follow his/her conscience and to respect the choices other believers are making. Yet, he notes:

1 Corinthians 8:8 – Food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

In other words, the food, even though it may have been used in pagan idol worship, is morally neutral. It is possible to separate it from its pagan use and eat it with gratitude toward God. So, when it comes to different activities, the question to be asked is: Can I practice this

particular activity without embracing its non-Christian roots. If so, it can be a beneficial and God-honoring activity.

Yet, a far more significant problem is not that these types of activities are wrong in themselves, but rather that we love them too much.

I have met folks who put way more trust in homeopathic medicine than they do in the Lord. And I have met folks who put way more trust in traditional medicine than they do the Lord. I am not opposed to either homeopathic or traditional medicine, but I am opposed to anything that becomes a rival “savior” to Jesus Christ.

And friends, that is worldliness seeping into our churches and into lives that alarms me the most. The rival saviors. The things about which we are becoming convinced we cannot live without. The things we are starting to believe will be the solution to all of our problems. The things to which we are willing to devote our time, energy and money.

As Tim Keller says, “Good things make the best idols.”

It is often not the bad things in our lives, but the good things which are tripping us up spiritually. We don’t have time to read the Bible, pray or go to church because we are too busy with _____. Fill in the blank (family, sports, job, hobby, etc.) with that good thing that is starting to dominate your life.

Oh friend, if you love bad things, that’s bad. But if you love good things too much, that is bad as well. Friends, it is about priorities.

2 Corinthians 4:18 – So we do not focus on what is seen (*the things that are worldly*), but on what is unseen (*the promises of God*). For what is seen (*the worldly*) is temporary, but what is unseen (*what God has promised*) is eternal.

May the Lord help us make that – make him – the focus of our lives each and every day!