

Intro:

We have completed our exposition of Romans 7. As a chapter, it speaks to us about three things:

1. The reality of our separation from the demands of the law because of our identification with Christ: the Law has no more power over us.
2. The effect of law in spiritual life is to multiply sin rather than righteousness: I know in more detail what is sin and I am provoked to more sin by law.
3. The struggle in the heart when law meets spirit is the core problem for sanctification: I see that in my natural self there is evil, yet in my renewed self I desire good.

I want to take our time this week to remind you that the struggle we face in sanctification is not made any easier by the world we live in.

We are going to take a break from Romans and go to 1 John 2, a passage we looked at last year in some detail, but there is more to say about it.

The reason that I want to go to 1 John at this point is because it speaks to us about an additional problem we face as we live out the *Struggle of Sanctification* we see in Romans 7. I think I have expressed the problem in my title:

And the World is not Idle

The subject of Romans 7 is me and my inner man. The subject of 1 John 2.15-17 is the world. The world complicates the life of me and my inner man.

Read 1 Jn 2.15-17

One thing to note before we get into the message: In Romans 7 at the very outset, we are taught that we are dead to the law. What does this passage sound like to you? (read again)

1 Jn 2.15-17 sounds like law, doesn't it? Why is that? Didn't John get the memo? Doesn't he know we are dead to the law?

To be dead to the law means:

- We died to the law in Christ – he paid the penalty for our sins, the law can no longer require our death.
- We died to the law in order to be bound to another – that is, Christ.
- We were bound to Christ so that we should slave [to Christ] in newness of Spirit [Know • Reckon • Yield • Obey]

To be dead to the law does NOT mean: No Law! No Will of God!

So when we come to a passage like this, we realize that the way to live it is to live it in the newness of Spirit [Know • Reckon • Yield • Obey]

But this admonition, Love not the World... why is the world such a problem for 'the life of me and my inner man'?

Proposition: The world attracts the heart, but the Christian heart must follow Christ.

I. The strong prohibition (15)

A. Offered in very plain terms (15a)

1. Nature of the prohibition: Either

- a. Stop doing something you are already doing, or
- b. Do not make it a habit of life

2. Focus of the prohibition: the world and 'the things in the world'

a. The world is...

"The 'world' (*kosmos*) represents the system of values, priorities, and beliefs that unbelievers hold that excludes God. It is a seductive system that appeals to all people, believers as well as unbelievers, and calls for our affection, participation, and loyalty (cf. John 3:16–17; 18–19; James 4:4). Satan controls this system, and believers should shun it (cf. 5:19; John 12:31; 14:30)."¹

"The 'world' (*kosmos*), thought of here as an entity hostile to God (cf. 4:4), is always a seductive influence which Christians should continually resist (cf. John 15:18-19; James 4:4. In other NT verses 'world' [*kosmos*] means people, e.g., John 3:16-17.) The world competes for the love of Christians and one cannot both love it and the Father at the same time."²

1) Note especially 1 Jn 5.19

2) Note the term "seductive"

b. The things in the world ... we will expand later

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), 1 Jn 2.15.

² Zane C. Hodges, "1 John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 1 Jn 2.15.

3. Subject of the prohibition: You

- a. 'My little children' (2.1)
- b. 'I write ... unto you' (2.7, 8)
- c. 'I write unto you' (2.12, 13)
- d. 'I have written unto you' (2.14)

The epistle is written to believers as believers. The prohibition is to believers...

B. Explained by a shocking possibility (15b)

1. Two possible understandings of 'the love of the Father'

- a. Love *from* the Father, *i.e.*, God's grace, salvation
 - 1) This would mean that the man who loves the world is not saved
 - 2) But this epistle, and this chapter especially, is written to believers
- b. Love *for* the Father, *i.e.*, the orientation of heart in 'any man'
 - 1) This would mean that it is possible for a believer to have little or no love for God, even though a believer
 - 2) The epistle *is* written to believers, but this conclusion seems shocking

2. Consider other passages

^{KJV} **Matthew 6.24** No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

^{KJV} **Luke 16.13** No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

^{KJV} **James 4.4** Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

3. Last two words: ‘in him’
 - a. He does not have the love of the Father ‘in him’
 - b. Constable: “reflects a controlling influence”³

So it seems that it is indeed possible for a believer to love the world, even to the extent of having very little visible love for the Father. Perhaps to the extent of having no love for the Father.

What would motivate someone to commit this sin?

II. The sizzling attraction (16)

- A. The things in the world are described by three terms
 1. The lust of the flesh
 2. The lust of the eyes
 3. The pride of life
- B. Some versions are very unhelpful here
 1. NIV: ‘the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does’ — weak on 1 and 3
 2. ESV [and others]: ‘the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions’ — weak on 3
- C. The list often gets analyzed as if it is our inner lusts – because it mirrors our inner lusts
 1. Lust of the flesh: desire for the indulgence of the senses
 2. Lust of the eyes: desire for the possession of the appealing
 3. Pride of life: desire for the exultation in the ‘life under the sun’⁴

As we consider these three terms, we recognize that they represent lusts that reside in our own hearts.

But if we think of them *only* in this way, we miss the impact and import of their meaning.

- D. This list makes up the ‘things in the world’ prohibited in v. 15
 1. All that is in the world is saturated by these lusts in one way or another

³ Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Jn 2.15.

⁴ These notes from our ‘Godliness-Worldliness’ series. My own definitions.

In another context I wrote: “The things of the world are infused with these lusts, enveloped in them, marinated in them!”

2. These things are what makes the world so appealing to us – the ordering of the world after the things that our fallen nature loves creates the appeal that draws the human heart.

“They put the sizzle in the world’s steak, they put the sparkle in the world’s jewels, they are the kin of our heart. Our heart resonates to the touch of the world’s strings. Why is it that the world exploits sexuality to sell everything from automobiles to soap? Because the world appeals to our heart this way.”⁵

You can analyze any ‘thing in the world’ for combinations of these elements:

- Many Canadians are captivated by hockey through these lusts – lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. Do Christians get so caught up in hockey that the love of the Father is not in them?
- Many Christians flock after the world in seeking out the latest fashions, the trendy look, the ‘lust on display’ of the fashion industry – lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life [even conservative fashions contain elements of these]. Are Christians so in pursuit of ‘the look’ that they fail of the love of the Father?
- The world today, in its baser elements, cultivates the culture of death in appearance: ‘Goth’ look [although maybe that’s going out?], piercings, tattoos – lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. It is one thing to have participated in these lusts prior to salvation, but after salvation? Can Christians have their eyes on these things and fail of the love of the Father?

⁵ Both self-citations from my blogpost, “*a summary: Worldliness edited by Mahaney*” published at oxgoad.ca, 6/13/2011

- We are seeing a rise in gambling in our society – they even televise poker regularly, apparently getting good ratings for it. I happened to see it on TV in the airport the other day... sound was off, thank goodness! The game apparently has an appeal. Can Christians participate in gambling so that they display little love of the Father? I have read Christian young people talking about how they like to ‘relax’ and have a little ‘recreation’ playing ‘low stakes’ poker games. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life...

You name any thing in the world that is popular with people and you will find that they are full of these lusts.

- The lust of the flesh – the love of the high, of the rush, whether chemically or psychologically induced
- The lust of the eyes – the attractiveness of worldly beauty, the gleam of new possessions, the ‘sexy’ sports car, the beautiful home with the three car garage and sweeping driveway
- The pride of life – the exultation of being part of the ‘in’ crowd [even if your ‘in’ crowd is on the ‘outside’ of society], the exultation of success in life, the feeling of shared glory when your team wins the Cup...

It is these things we are not to love, which brings us to...

III. The sober contemplation (17)

A. The world and its lusts are temporary

B. God and his rewards last forever

By way of illustration, let me just quote J. Vernon McGee:

“I have always enjoyed going to England and visiting such places as the Tower of London, Tewkesbury Castle, Warwick Castle, Hampton Court, Windsor Castle, and Canterbury. Many of us have ancestors who came from over there, but those folk were a bloody, cruel, vain, and worldly people. Just recall the way Henry VIII took Hampton Court away from Cardinal Wolsey who was the one who had built it. Poor old Cardinal Wolsey before he died said something like this, ‘If I had only served my God like I served my king, I wouldn’t be here today.’

“My, how Henry VIII could eat! And when he got tired of a wife—he had several—he just sent her to the Tower to be beheaded. Go and look at all of that today—’the world passeth away.’ What a story of bloodshed is told at the Tower of London, of the pride of life and of the lust of the flesh. The lust of the eyes also—how beautiful Windsor and Hampton Court are! Even the arrangement of the flowers was made by Sir Christopher Wren, the wonderful architect who also built St. Paul’s Cathedral. There is a glory that belongs to all of that, but it has already passed away. England is just a third-rate power in the world today and maybe not even a third-rate power. All of that has passed away and the lust of it. Where is the lust of Henry VIII today? It is in one of those tombs over there. Just think of all the glory which is buried in Westminster—all of that has passed away.

“When I look back to when I was a young man, I wish that somehow I could reach back there and reclaim some of those days and some of the strength which I had then. I wish I could use for God what I squandered when I was young. ‘The world is passing away.’

“‘But he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.’ Why don’t you work at something which is permanent, something which has stability, something which is going to last for eternity?’”⁶

⁶ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible commentary*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 1 Jn 2.17.

Conclusion:

Proposition: The world attracts the heart, but the Christian heart must follow Christ.

Part of the struggle we face is this: the world looks *so* good that we can't imagine that a little bit of interest in the world will hurt us.

Some monks take a vow of poverty. I don't think that is what the Bible is after in telling us not to love the world.

But here is what it is after: Love God. Love the Father. Love the Son. Love the Spirit.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

What kind of difference would be made in your life and in your witness if you took the time you spent on worldly things and put it to use in knowing God and serving God?