

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 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. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. I John 2:15-17

Pretty simple wouldn't you agree. Straight forward. "Don't love the world or anything in the world." If you do that means you don't love God. So tell me, how comfortable are you with those words? Well let me share a little something with you. I love spaghetti. I love fishing. I love football. I love hiking in the mountains. I love traveling. I love my children, and I love my wife. God says, **15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.** Do I have a problem? At first glance it would seem I do. And if I do, so do you. You want proof? Raise your hand if you love your mother. Is God saying here that loving him means that we have no regard, no desire, no love for anyone or anything else? Now I don't think there is anyone here this morning who has read the rest of the Bible and would say that God is telling us that we aren't to have any regard or desire or love for anything or anyone besides him. But still we have to ask, "what do we do with this passage?" Toss it out? Then the rest of the Bible is in question.

There is a problem here but it isn't with what God says here, it lies in the clumsy way that the English language uses the word love. I hope that you recognize that my love for my children is different than love that I have for hiking in the mountains. I hope that my wife recognizes that when I tell her I love her, it's different than my love for spaghetti. And for all who raised their hands when I asked if you love your mom, you understand that love for your mother is different than love for a spouse, but English uses one word to express it all. The language of the Bible does not. In fact, in the Bible there are multiple words for our English word love, and that really helps us this morning because the word John uses here is the word for the highest form of love. Maybe you've even heard the word "agape" before. It's the word that God uses to describe his love for us, it's a love that is selfless. It's a love that elevates its object above all else. It isn't romantic love, it isn't describing a feeling of enjoyment. It's a word that expresses complete and utter care and appreciation for that which is loved. So what is God saying through his apostle John here? If you elevate anyone or anything in your life to a higher level than God, if your relationship with things or people drive your decision making over and above your relationship with God, if you place your hopes and dreams and trust in things or in people rather than in God – well, really you've made those things or those people your God and he no longer has a place in your life.

Does that mean I can't love the taste of Spaghetti or the sport of football or playing an instrument? Does that mean I can't love my wife and family and still be a Christian? Certainly not, in fact God commands me to love my wife and family, meaning I put their welfare above my own, meaning I work to provide for their physical and mental and spiritual well being. OK so I can breathe a sigh of relief. Everything is OK. I can love God and all these other things, too right? Well... not so fast. "I love spaghetti. I love fishing. I love football. I love hiking in the mountains. I love traveling. I love my children, and I love my wife." God says, "**15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.**" Do I have a problem? Not necessarily. Might I have a problem? Absolutely.

These words aren't really intended as a pat on the back are they? They are a warning. People who agape love the world or anything in the world don't love God, they are on the path to hell. Don't let that happen to you! And in verse 16 he supplies more context that helps us understand just exactly what he is warning against: **16 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 terms, "lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life." Give form to what it means to agape love the world. Can I appreciate the taste of my favorite food? Sure. But when having and eating the best is driving my decision making and occupies my mind and my time, crowding God out, that's a problem. Can I enjoy watching a football game have a favorite team, or practice hard and play on or coach a team? Absolutely. But when watching the game, and performing on the field are first and foremost on my mind and become my primary life goals, that's a problem. Can I enjoy my job and work hard to do well? Certainly, but if I become fixated on advancement, or beating the competition, or receiving compliments and awards, or being the envy of others becomes the driving force in my life, that's a problem. Can I love my spouse and family – of course, but when the success or perception, or wealth of my family become the primary things that drive the decisions I make and my relationship and their relationship with God are secondary at best, that's a problem.

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because it's all too easy for things of enjoyment and appreciation for the things and people that God provides to become agape love above our love for God.

So how do we keep ourselves from crossing that line? It's tempting to want to write a rule book isn't it? If you did this many devotions this week compared to this many hours at work, then you're OK. If you spent this much time in church vs. this much time practicing with the band, you're OK. If you spent this much money on vacation and this much on church then you're OK. And let's be honest, we like to play the comparison game here, too. I read the Bible every day with my children while this person just goes to church. I give this much while that family gives almost nothing. Do you see the irony? That's the exact "pride of life" that John warns against.

OK, what then? Well John seems to give an answer at the end of verse seventeen. "**But whoever does the will of God lives forever**" Aha, I need to do God's will – I need to obey his commands, then my relationship with him will be strong. Then I won't fall for the allure of all these worldly things. I'll start volunteering at the hospital. I'll start giving more to church. I'll serve as an usher. I'll help clean the church. I'll visit the sick. That's what John is saying, I need to do more and that will preserve my relationship with God. Except that isn't what John is doing with this statement. Yes he describes one aspect of the person who will be in heaven: they do God's will. But notice that while he clearly says, "Do not love the world," he does not say, "instead, do God's will." He just says that those who do the will of God will live forever. Doing God's will is the evidence of a healthy relationship with God. It isn't the means of entering, establishing, or maintaining a healthy relationship with God. A person who has a healthy relationship with God will grow in their Christian living. They will do his will more and more. But that isn't why they are going to heaven. That isn't what made their relationship with God strong. OK so how do we keep from crossing that line? How do we heed God's warning through John?

It's by going back and continually keeping in front of us the one who agape loved us. In fact if your thinking that Pastor Weigand is somehow twisting John's words, just you read on to the chapter where he pens these familiar words: "We love because he first loved us." How do I maintain an agape love for God? I go back to the manger where the God of the universe became a helpless child. I go back to his temptation in the wilderness and watch as he masterfully sidesteps the traps of Satan that I fall into on an almost daily basis. I follow him in his ministry and see his care for the sick and lonely and cast offs. I go back to Caiaphas' house and watch as he is unfairly tried. I go back to Golgotha and hear his prayer for those who are crucifying him. I ponder on the first words of verse 17 **The world and its desires pass away**, I remember the certainty that I too will one day be buried. I shudder at the list of my life's words and thoughts and deeds which should prevent my going to heaven, and then I remember Jesus' empty tomb and his words: "Because I live, you also will live." I go back time and time again to read the accounts of the lives of the flawed people in the Bible's pages – people like me. And guess what – my love for God – agape love, grows. How do we heed John's warning? Not with a book of new rules and regulations, not by a determination to do more good stuff – we go back and go back and go back and spend time with our God. Then our love grows, and our God pleasing actions increase – not because we have to do them, but because we want to.

I'd like to close by sharing one person's tool for helping him to keep going back to the love of God as a way to fight against love for the world. First he shared that as an idea from a Bible study he had attended, he put a piece of paper in his wallet that said, "God loves a cheerful giver." He put a framed placard above his TV that said, "Whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God," and he placed a card on his work desk with the parable of the ten talents. He said, "You know I found those reminders helped me to do more good things, but I found that I really wasn't doing them because I wanted too, and to be truthful, I actually started to resent them. I shared this with a friend who made a suggestion – I still kept a paper in my wallet, a placard above my TV and a paper on my work desk. But I changed the passages. In my wallet the passage now says, "And God will provide all that you need so that on every occasion you can be generous." The one above my TV says, "The Blood of Jesus, his son purifies us from every sin," and the one on my desk says, "While we were still sinners Christ died for us." Do you know what, he said? "That made all the difference, I'm still growing in what I do, but I'm starting to love doing it." Why did that make such a difference? "I started to focus on what Christ did for me instead of what I was supposed to do for him, that brought me closer to him, and now I'm sure not perfect, but I'm growing."

How can you and I appreciate and enjoy the people and blessings that God has given without falling for the lust of our eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of this world? Whether it's with paper reminders or placards or simply time on our calendars, we go back and back and back to the perfect agape love of Christ. Who do you love? Love the one who loved you first. AMEN.