

How to Live Forever

by
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“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. 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. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17).

HAVE you ever had full intentions of not committing a given sin, or full intentions of doing a good work, but a moment of temptation arose and you did exactly the opposite of what you had planned to do? You are among friends. All of us have to say yes to that question. But why? It is not that we are willful sinners. We do not plan to sin. But oftentimes, no matter how hard we try, we do not behave the way we wish.

Many theories have been advanced to explain this failure of man. One theory contends that man was born a sinner. That is just the way he is; that is the nature of Adam. It is called by some “the original sin” and by others “the Adamic Sin.” Others say that it is because man lives in a sinful world. His environment and culture are so full of temptation that sin becomes inevitable.

Philosophers, theologians, and preachers have been trying to understand this weakness of man for centuries. We may have to wait until the Day of Judgment before we know all the answers to this question. I do know that just telling people they should not sin is not enough. Even pointing out to people the dangers, wrongs, and risks in sin is not enough.

First John 2:15-17, however, does help us with this problem by giving us one reason we behave the way we do. While we will never completely remove all sin from our lives in this life, this passage will help us to improve and live more closely to God.

I. THE EXHORTATION: “LOVE NOT THE WORLD”

John says, “Do not love the world.” Just what does he mean? What is the world? Often we use “world” to mean the created earth in which we live, as it was used in the Greek and Hebrew languages. Obviously, John was not using the word this way. When God created this earth He looked at it and declared it good. John, therefore, was not referring to the physical world. God intended for us to enjoy the beauty and resources of this earth.

John is not referring to the world of human endeavor and accomplishment around us. In the beginning God told man, “Have dominion over the earth.”

John certainly is not referring to the people of the world, for “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Later in 1 John 4:9, John says, “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.”

In summary, John is not talking about the creation, the accomplishments of man, or the people of the world.

What, then, does he include? The world refers to that part of our culture that is apart from God. First John 5:4, 5 illustrates this interpretation. John says, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. And who is

the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" The world in this passage is the opposite of that which is by faith. To love the world is to love that which is not of Christ. In 1 John 5:19 he says, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." That part of our culture which Satan controls Christians are to shun. One man has said, "The world is a world from which we cannot escape and yet a world which need not contaminate a single one of us." We live in the world but we are not of the world. We live in the created world, but a part of this world we cannot, as Christians, endear to our souls.

Cosmos, the word from which we get our word *worldly*, is used commonly in many compound words in the English language. We get our word *cosmopolitan* from it. A very interesting word that has come from the word is cosmetics. The Greek language has two words for *world*. We have only one word. The word *cosmos* means the creation, not as it was originally created, but as it is arranged and functioning in the hands of man. That is what we are not to love. We are not to love this world, this culture, this society from the viewpoint of its organization, value system, and standards. John says, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world." To love the world is contrary to God's will. We have a choice to make.

The law said, "Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God is one God." That is what is to be important to Christians too. God created us; it is God who loved us; it is God who gave His Son to die for us. We must love God above all else.

When a man takes a wife (or a woman takes a husband), certain commitments in life are just eliminated. Any thought of any intimate relationship with anyone other than the husband or wife is just removed. When God says, "Love not the world," He is saying that our relationship with God should be so great and our values and judgments should be so rooted in God that we no longer have any desire for the things in the world. They no longer have any allurements for us. John says, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." If a man has an affair with another woman or is going from one woman to another, he does not love his wife. He may think he loves her, but he is deceived by evil.

If a man loves the world, he cannot love God. If God comes into your heart, He fills up your whole heart. That filling up of your heart enables you to love your wife properly, your children more, the church more, and lost souls more; but His love cannot co-exist with the love of the world. They just cannot dwell in the same heart.

II. THE EXPLANATION: "LUST IS OF THE WORLD"

John further says, "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." I used to think these avenues were three totally separate avenues. But the more I have studied this passage, the more I am beginning to think that they are all just three sides of the love of the world or, as the New English Version says, "the cravings of sinful men."

Historically, we have considered the lust of the flesh to be adultery, drunkenness, or the overt sins of the flesh. They are certainly included in the lust of the flesh but there is more. In certain contexts and situations overeating and overindulging may stem from the lust of the flesh as much as adultery does. It is difficult to teach our children to avoid the lust of the flesh if we are living for the physical pleasures of this body too.

I know that the lust of the eyes includes pornography but it also includes much more. Often we are more interested in the beauty of the eye than the beauty of the heart. Even when our young ladies dress up for worship they are sometimes more interested in dressing to lure the right kind of young man. Young men are more interested in whether they have that physique, that physical power, than possessing the beauty of a faithful Christian.

This last part of worldliness is pride of life or vainglory. Do you know what the word *vain-glory* really means? It means rivalry or competition. The New English Version says, "The boasting of what he has and does." Vainglorious people are more concerned about their accomplishments than about their spirituality. When a man gets rich or runs for a public office, we think he has the pride of life, but he may not have. The family in which athletic accomplishments take priority over the spiritual life, in which winning is more

important than salvation, is influenced by the pride of life. I believe just about as many preachers will be lost for pride as anything else. I know, because, as the old country boy said, "I are one." Getting ahead, getting a big church, getting the right salary, or getting the right accomplishments could originate from the pride of life.

We often struggle with our children at home over something that seems to be overtly sinful and worldly. But they may be acting out in life the sense of values they see in our lives. They are doing something which is a little less socially acceptable.

It is not sinful to make money. Abraham was a rich man. He was rich enough to have his own army. I have never known anybody that rich, have you? It is not wrong to be rich, but it is wrong to allow a job to crowd out God. Something is very wrong when God is dethroned! That is the love of the world.

People who have fallen away from Christ did not say one day, "I am going to get a big bottle of liquor, and I don't care who knows about it." It is a gradual erosion as a person's value system begins to be his money, his success, his popularity, his good looks, his education, or something else. These are good within themselves, but they are wrong when they become the most important things in life. John said, "Love not the world."

If we as preachers, elders, Bible class teachers, and mommas and daddies want to convince our children not to love the world, we cannot begin by teaching them not to dance, mix swim, or drink. We have to teach young people plainly, but this is not where we start. That is like taking aspirin for a headache when you have a brain tumor. It does relieve the pain for a while, and it is necessary; but you have to get at the root of the problem before the pain will really go away. We must start with teaching youth not to love the world.

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT: "DO THE WILL OF GOD"

If we stopped at this point, this passage could almost come across as being negative; but God never stops with the negative. He says the love of the world is not of the Father but is of the world, and the world and its lust is passing away. All of the lusts we have been thinking about are temporary. There is nothing wrong with having a

fine athletic body, but it is temporary. A few people stay fairly active until they get along in life, but sooner or later the body wears out.

Making money is a tremendous activity. It can be a real blessing. But money wears out. I can remember when I first started preaching. I thought, "If I can just find a church that will pay me \$5,000 a year, I will have it made." Remember how it was? Then, the first thing I knew, I was shooting for \$15,000 a year. Do you know what happens? Wherever you get, it is not as fulfilling as you thought it would be, and you need still more. Your needs increase as your income increases.

I have two used cars; one has fifty thousand miles on it and the other has ninety thousand. I have been taking good care of them because I do not want to buy a new one—they are too expensive. But I know that somewhere down the line, in a few months or years, I will either have to buy a new car or walk. We have a nice home. It is as nice as we have ever lived in. But one of these days the roof is going to cave in. It will wear out. All the material things we think are so important "are passing away," John says. He is not writing about just the sinful things. The good things we sometimes think are so tremendous are fleeting. John, however, points to something that lasts: "But the one who does the will of God abides forever."

An athletic body cannot really do anything for you; it cannot give you anything that will last. The one thing that you *can* have in your life that will last is your relationship with God. He loves you. It does not make any difference how many mistakes you have made—he still loves you. It does not make any difference how deep in sin you were before you became a Christian, God loves you. If you have been washed in the blood of Jesus and are walking in the light as He is in the light, you are going to live forever with God. What can compare with that realization? Can money? Good health? A new car? A new wardrobe? Living forever with God is the answer to overcoming the world. As long as you only see the negative side, "Love not the world," you will be constantly struggling with this and that sin. You will get up every morning confused and go to bed at night depressed. Just as soon as you get over one fault, you will run into another one. Or, just as soon as you think you are pretty strong,

before you know what has happened, down you will go again. As long as you just treat the symptoms you will go to your grave a miserable failure.

I do not mean that if you love God and do His will you will not make any mistakes. But I am saying that if you are loving God and putting your relationship with Him above everything else, the blood of Jesus Christ is cleansing you daily from your sins. Even when you slip and fall, God will lift you up by His grace and enable you to confess your sin and say, "I have been cleansed by His blood."

In life many decisions have to be made. People develop ulcers just from trying to make decisions. Some decisions, if made properly, rule out several other decisions. When a couple say, "I do," that eliminates many decisions from their future. An unmarried young man has decisions to make. He has to decide which girl he wants to ask to go with him. If the one he really wants to go with him turns him down, he will either ask someone else or just go with some of the guys. Decisions, decisions. Or, a girl gets asked on Monday for a date on Saturday night, but the young man is really not her first choice. She has to make a decision: Does she want to put this boy off in hopes that the boy she really wants to go with will ask, or is it better to go ahead and get a date while she knows she can get one? Decisions, decisions. But when you marry, you do not have those decisions to make anymore. They are over. You never have to make such decisions again because you have made a commitment.

When you really come to God and are washed in the blood of Christ, you rule out many decisions. You no longer have to decide, "Am I going to go out with the gang and get drunk?" You do not have to decide whether or not you are going to do many things that many people struggle with every day. This does not mean that you will not have to make decisions. Decisions are going to stay with you all your life. Yet, you get all of the difficult ones in one decision. When you say,

"I believe in Jesus; I repent of my sins; I am going to confess my faith and be baptized into Jesus," you have made a decision that covers all kinds of decisions. You have decided not to love the world.

The Bible says, "Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God is one God." God must be first. Money cannot be on the throne. Athletics cannot be in first place. Popularity cannot be primary. All other things may have a place in your life, but they cannot be number one.

CONCLUSION

These principles are not going to resolve every problem in life; I am not that naive. But I do believe that the more you practice loving God and understanding how He rules your life, the more you can see how fleeting this world is. As you get older you can see more clearly what really matters. In the center of your life is God and His will, and everything else has to fall into place around that great centerrest.

Consider these words from an article about the world:

Most Christians now accept the world as a playground instead of a battleground. They are facing both ways, enjoying Christ and the world, too, and gleefully telling everyone that accepting Jesus does not require them to give up their fun and that Christianity is just the jolliest thing imaginable. It is great to be a Christian; it is a joy to be a Christian. But do not mistake the joy of Christianity for the frivolous fun of the world. Christians have more fun than anyone, but it is not the frivolous fun of the world. It is a fun that is lasting, that is enduring, that is rooted in Christ.

Whom do you love? This question boils down life's issues to a decision. In some areas of life you can straddle the fence. But when it comes to God and the world, you have to make a clear-cut decision. What does the world have to offer? It may give you a good time for a while, but it does not last. What does God have to offer? He offers a good time also, but it is a joy and a peace that will last forever. Whom do you love? Do you love God or the world?

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Illustrations . . . Success

Pilot or Co-Pilot?

At a grocery store parking lot, a friend sat in his parked car waiting for his wife. His attention was drawn to an incoming station wagon because of the banged-up condition of the vehicle. "Never in all my life," said my friend, "had I ever seen a car so demolished and still able to move under its own power." He went on to say, "It looked as though it had just come from losing a demolition derby."

His wait to see if the rear end was in as bad shape as the front brought a hearty laugh at the sticker poster on the rear bumper. In big red letters it read, *GOD IS MY CO-PILOT*.

"Somehow," he said, "the sticker and condition of the wagon didn't seem to add up."

It made sense to me. I have seen hundreds of people who

have wrecked their lives in the fashion of the man with the demolished wagon. They wanted God to be their co-pilot instead of being their *PILOT*!

Don Sharp,
The Restoration Herald
(July, 1981)

Vision

Just a shapeless lump of clay—
Naught there the senses to attract—

Offending me in every way—

A glob of mud, to be exact.

But with a look of sheer delight,

One placed it on a potter's wheel
And spun it 'round with all his might,

And shaped a vessel—graceful—
real!

He saw what I had failed to see:
The worth and beauty that could be!

"He's human garbage!" I was told.

"Don't waste your precious time on him!

His life's a mess! His heart is cold!

His future's bleak, his prospects grim!"

But love won out, and turned him 'round

And set him on the heavenward 'road.

A quiet peace and joy he's found
In helping others with their load.

Lord, help me in each one to see
The worth and beauty that can be!

Hugh C. Kafton

Take Time to Pray

S. D. Gordon reminds us that God's great people are those who pray. They do not have the time, but they take the time from other things that are important and pressing.

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