

Eternal?

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[0 : 00] It's so good to be with you. This morning we're continuing our series in 1 John. It has been a great series so far. We've learned so much.

Today we're just going to look at three verses and yet they are such incredible verses that speak so much to us where we are as individuals, where we are as a society and a real reorientation about what it will all mean in the end.

John writes this letter of 1 John to a congregation of people that are unsettled. And they're unsettled because a number of people from among them have gone out.

They've left. They've claimed they're superior in spirituality. They've said, well, we're Premier League and you that remain are like the Vanarama Football Conference.

We are far better than you. And therefore we need to go in alone if you're not going to stunt our progress. So John writes this letter to those who remain to reassure them, to say they aren't living some sub-pseudo-Christianity.

[1 : 15] They're not living some shadowy existence. But they are the real deal. In the first part of his letter he's told them four big things.

Here's the first. That fellowship with God and his son Jesus Christ is exclusively through the apostolic gospel. Fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ his son is exclusively through the apostolic gospel.

It is by believing the authoritative account recorded and transmitted by those who saw, heard, touched and looked upon Jesus.

Those that were uniquely empowered by the Holy Spirit to write it all down. That it is by believing that message that we have fellowship with God and Jesus Christ his son.

Secondly, John has said that the summation of the apostolic message, this is the message that we proclaim to you. God is light.

[2 : 14] In him, darkness, no, not at all. That's what he says, that God is light. Speaking about God's absolute purity. And the clarity of his revelation that God in Jesus Christ has fully disclosed himself.

There's no grey areas. There's no small print. And then he went on to say that in the church, sin is exclusively cleansed, purified, propitiated, advocated for and atoned for by Jesus Christ.

Any spirituality that says sin isn't the problem and Jesus isn't the answer is a false spirituality. And it seems that's exactly what these splinter church is claiming.

And so John is very clear. He says they're liars. They're lying. And they're making God out to be a liar.

And then last week with Graham, he was laying out for us that the gospel has necessarily a horizontal dimension. That the fact you're a real deal is seen not in just your love for God, but in your love for the brothers.

[3 : 36] You therefore know you're the real deal. You really know the God who is light if you are in the apostolic gospel, dependent constantly on Jesus' forgiveness and loving your brothers and sisters in obedience to God's command.

He finishes the first part of the letter saying to them that they really have got it. He writes twice to three groups of people.

I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven. He says you do know God. You have overcome the evil one. And the word of God lives in you.

You've really got it. You're the real deal. Don't doubt that if you've got Jesus, you've got everything. And so in part one, John was making the truth really big.

And now as we enter part two, he's going to hone in and get the false teachers in his crosshairs and start to tackle them on what they're saying. Start to undo all the promises and claims that they're making.

[4 : 47] And also the tone of the letter changes. In the first half of the letter, John is saying it's like this. And it's like this. And you are this. In part two of the letter, there's a lot of imperatives.

You must now do this. On account of that, do this. He gives them lots of commands. Let what you heard from the beginning remain in you. Do not let anyone lead you astray.

Love not with words or speech, but with actions and in truth. Do not believe every spirit, but test.

The spirits keep yourselves from idols.

They're all commands from John. And the first imperative in the letter is in our passage this morning. So if you could turn to 1 John, chapter 2, verses 15 to 17.

I'll put it on the screen for you as well. John writes this. Do not love the world or anything in the world.

[5 : 51] If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 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 world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. Let's pray and then we'll look at this together.

O to grace how great a debt a daily we're constrained to be. Let your goodness, like a fetter, bind our wandering hearts to thee. Prone to wander, Lord, we feel it.

Prone to leave the God we love. So here are our hearts. O take and seal them. Seal them for your courts above. We pray these in Jesus' name, for his sake and for his glory alone.

Amen. Detail really matters. Detail matters. Specifics are important. From the quantity surveyor to the contract lawyer to the fine artist to the civil engineer.

[7 : 08] Details are important. We have the phrase, don't we, God is in the detail. Suggesting that it is in paying attention to the small things that brings great rewards.

So I was preaching at a different church last Sunday night and I went on a little bit long. It's good to know that I keep my form at away games as well as home games. And by the time I got to the door to shake people's hands and say goodbye, I was thirsty.

I needed coffee so badly. So I stood there, you know, nice to see you. God bless. See you. And this little woman, who I think was an angel in disguise, came and said, please could I get you a drink?

And I went, that would be lovely. Please could I have a strong coffee, splash of milk, no sugar.

Perfect. Two minutes later, she arrived with a styrofoam cup in a plastic holder.

Passed it to me. I took a gulp without even looking what was in. And what was in there was the milkiest, sugariest tea you've ever imagined. So this morning when Karen said to me, can I get you a drink?

[8 : 18] And I said, strong coffee, dash of milk. And it turned up perfectly. I thought there really is no place like home. Detail is really important. Or the couple who wanted a Bible verse on their wedding cake.

And so they went to the bakery, ordered a three-tier cake and requested it to be iced with 1 John 4, verse 18. Which says, there is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.

Unfortunately, the baker, failing to pay attention to the detail, simply wrote John 4, verse 18. So on their wedding day, to their horror, they were presented with a cake upon which in beautiful writing was written, the fact is you have had five husbands.

And the man you now have is not your husband. What you say is quite true. Detail is very important. Paying attention really does pay dividends in the end. And so when we come to 1 John, chapter 2, verses 15 to 17, every detail is important.

[9 : 28] Though it is only three verses, it is jam-packed with truth that we need to hear. And the first thing we need to hear is what does John mean by the world?

What does he mean by the world? When he says, do not love the world, does that mean you can't stand in front of a Rembrandt and say, that's lovely? Is that what he means?

Is it that after you have a really nice slice of marmalade toast, you can't say, mmm, I really enjoyed that because that was worldly? What does he mean? And so much for our world, isn't it?

Our world is very worldly. It would seem that John is calling the world these people that have left.

These people that are obviously quite prosperous.

And it would be very easy, wouldn't it, as those who remain to look at a church full of very affluent, prosperous people and go, they've really got it. God is really blessing them.

[10:32] So John writes this passage not to just address worldliness but to help those that remain. Still so relevant in our day, isn't it? Where so many would dress materialism up as the gospel.

Claiming temporal prosperity as a divine right. Flaunting wealth as a mark of spiritual blessing.

Sowing seeds in order that investment might reap a mighty harvest in this life.

And yet closer to home, it's very easy for us, isn't it? We've got a world that flaunts to us very lovely things. And it's so easy as we go out into that world on Monday to listen to those lies.

And to start being enticed and enamored by the things of the world. So John structures this very clearly. He gives us a command. He then gives us three reasons and one final incentive.

So let's look at the command. It's pretty simple. Do not love the world. Do not love the world. And immediately we have to discern what does John mean by the world?

[11:44] What is it that we're not to love? Well, John uses the word world in a great number of different ways in his writing.

So he says the world was made by God through the agency of his word. He says that the world was loved by God in sending his son Jesus.

He says that the world is the object of God's saving purpose. He claims that Jesus is the light of the world. He says Jesus is the savior of the world.

He says Jesus is the propitiation for the world's sins. He says Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

He seems to paint the word world in a very positive light. But he also uses the world to describe those outside of Christ, lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything divine or pleasing to God.

[12:49] So it is the world, one John, that lies in the grip of the evil one. It is the world that is orientated against God. When Jesus came into the world, the world did not recognize him.

The world doesn't recognize his followers either. The world, in fact, hates those who follow Jesus, just as it hated Jesus himself.

So in places like John 8, verse 23, where Jesus is being questioned about his identity, he says this, You are from below, I am from above. You are of this world, I am not of this world.

So in context, John is warning his readers against love for this world. Love for the world that is the godless world, a world conformed against God, bereft of knowledge of God, an idol-ridden, rebellious, disobedient, self-indulgent, unregenerate world, and all its trappings.

A diabolical world orientated against God and inhabited without reference to God. He says, Do not love the world, the world that seeks to airbrush God out, that exchanges the truth about God for a lie, and lives like God doesn't exist, a foolish world.

[14:22] Having started to understand definition, our immediate response, Do not love the world, is why shouldn't I love the world? And what does the world look like in my own life?

Well, that's what John is going to go on to tell us. He gives us three compelling reasons why loving the world is foolish, fatuous, and futile. So here's the first.

In verse 15b, If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. Love for the world is opposed to love for the Father.

John is saying they are totally incongruent. You cannot love the world and love the Father. They are mutually exclusive. They are antithetical. If you're loving the world, you cannot be loving the Father. It is impossible. Thomas Chalmers, that famous Scottish preacher, wrote, The love of God and the love of the world are two affections, not merely in a state of rivalry, but in a state of enmity.

[15:31] And that's so irreconcilable that they cannot dwell together in the same bosom. It's also classic. Jesus, not just Chalmers.

No one, not even you, can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve both God and money. You cannot serve both God and the world. You cannot be one who glorifies God by enjoying Him forever, whilst at the same time seeking pleasure, meaning, and worth from stuff.

It is impossible, says John. Loving the world and what it offers, clinging to and craving something that isn't God, is diagnostic that love for the Father is absent from your life.

Love for the world is diametrically opposed to love for the Father, incongruent, antithetical, incompatible. It is chalk and cheese, hips and hearts.

[16 : 38] They cannot both coexist together. Do not love the world, says John, because if you do, you cannot be loving the Father.

It's very real, isn't it? It's very binary, because we all think we can. We can have a slice of God and a slice of the world, and that'll do us.

Second reason John gives us that we shouldn't love the world is that everything in the world comes from the world, not from the Father. That it originates in the world.

Just read verse 16 with me. 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.

He helps us, doesn't he? Tell us what love for the world looks like. He gives us three things. The lust of the flesh. Those internal desires that well up inside us.

[17 : 48] The cravings of the sinful, selfish self. Pleasure, indulgence, status, respect, laziness.

I don't want to do any work today. Gluttony. I deserve all this stuff. The selfish desires that make it all about us. That self-serving, self-obsessed, self-seeking, selfish streak that's in all of us.

That narcissistic trait we're prone to, where we think no one loves me quite as much as me. The lust of the flesh, those internal desires that well up in our hearts, from which evil flows.

A world where beauty is devoid of goodness, where pleasure is devoid of joy, where identity is devoid of God, and where worship is turned inward to ourselves.

Lust of the flesh is where worldliness originates from. Secondly, we get the lust of the eyes. That's not our internal cravings, but our external covetings.

[19 : 03] Not the wandering heart, but the wandering eyes. The eye seeing and the heart responding, I need that. I must have that. I deserve that.

All the language of idolatry. Eye seeking things first, not the kingdom of God. The desire to acquire. I'll have one of those, one of those, one of those, two of those, because I'm worth it. And it's fueled in our world by advertising, enforced by materialism, stoked by superficiality, and spurred on by this inward desire, we have to keep up with the Joneses, who always seem to be running faster than we are.

Jesus again, at the beginning of the parable of the rich fool. Watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life, real life, true life, does not consist in an abundance of possessions.

It's the snare of our world. You are what you drive. You are what you eat. You are what you make your phone calls on. You are the make of shirt that you adorn to your work on Monday morning.

[20 : 17] A snare we all entangle ourselves in all the time. It's the lies of the world penetrate into our lives. Desires that do not originate from God, but from the world and end in the accumulation of stuff, the lust of the eyes.

And thirdly, the pride of life. The emotional response to the previous two. So when you get new things, what do you want to do with them?

Well, you want to show them to people, don't you? I certainly do. The new Amazon package arrives in the office. Undo it. Hey, Graham. Guess what I got?

That's the natural response. The pride of life. C.H. Dodd in his new English Bible, he translates the pride of life as the arrogance produced by material possessions.

A foolish fanaticism with replacing God as the focus and the source of all joy with stuff. Our hardwired hearts that readily become idol factories and latch onto things and find our status, our worth, our identity from them.

[21 : 35] Our short-sightedness that adjusts our field of vision to this world only and not to the world that come. All these are wrong.

The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Why? Because they don't originate in a good God, but they originate in a fallen world. John says, don't love the world because love for the world stems and flows from worldliness, not from God.

Don't love the world because you can't love God and the world. Don't love the world because love for the world originates in the world. And the third reason he gives us is this. The world and its desires are passing away.

It won't last. It's not going to survive. We observe this in our lives all the time. That the stuff we buy doesn't last as long as we want.

So in 2010, I got my first iPhone, the iPhone 3S. I was really excited about it. I thought finally my life would be complete.

[22 : 46] Then in September 2010, they bought out the iPhone 4 and I couldn't even look at my 3S anymore. But I thought, you've done this to me before, Steve Jobs.

I'm going to wait. So I waited a whole year and got the iPhone 5. And then, the iPhone 6 came out and again, couldn't even look at it.

And so I just got a new phone, the 6 Plus, which is nice and big so I can show it off to everyone. And I quite like it. It's not completing my life in the way that they promise.

But do you know what? I don't even know what's happened to my iPhone 3S. I dare say it's in a rubbish heap somewhere in India. But at the time, it was everything to me.

I had apps for everything and isn't that the nature of all worldliness? That we save and we think and it's this one and now I'm complete and then it's gone and it's passed away.

[23 : 51] Everything is on a downward spiral to devaluing. It will not last. The world is passing away. New cars hastily devalued, new houses perpetually running down, holidays consigned to the Facebook album, meals quickly digested, gadgets superseded, clothes rapidly worn out, wealth consistently eroded.

Time is passing and as time passes, stuff passes away. The world is passing away. We strive for it. We finally acquire it.

It's quickly defunct and eventually dumped. That's the way of the world. It is passing away. The temporal nature of this life makes investing our lives in it a bad move.

Again, classic Jesus. It's almost like John and Jesus hung out all the time and it was John who actually saw and actually touched and actually looked upon and actually heard Jesus because it's classic Jesus all the time.

Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy.

[25 : 13] And where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also. What does Jesus say at the end of the parable of the rich fall?

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul and the answer is nothing because the world passes away?

All this stuff. iPhones, cars, houses, suits, the end of the day are just going to be moths and rust if they last that long. If not, they'll be stolen.

That's what John is saying. Loving the world is futile because the world is passing away. So John says this. Do not love the world or anything in the world because it's supposed to love for the Father.

It originates not from the Father but from the world. And its outcome is that the world ends and then you've got nothing. But I think this is where John's final point is so important because he gives us an incentive.

[26 : 17] We cannot simply avert our eyes from adverts, put a filter on our Amazon account and set up rigorous austerity measures in our spending. They might tackle the symptoms of worldliness but they will not tackle the heart issue.

May alter our behaviour but won't alter our being. It may change the manifestation of our wants but it will not quell them from inside us.

So I read this great rhyme from the deep south about worldliness. It says this. If you want to tackle worldliness do not drink or smoke or swear or chew and don't go out with girls who do.

It's just a sticking plaster isn't it? It's just dealing with the behaviour. That's why John's final incentive is so helpful. He says this. Whoever does the will of God will live forever.

If you weigh up what the world is offering foolishness futility fatuousness short life and you add up what God is offering there's eternal life doing the will of God and loving loving God is synonymous in John.

[27 : 33] Whoever loves me will keep my commands. If you love me you'll do what I say. He's saying the same thing but whoever loves God most will live forever.

whoever if you keep my commands you will remain in my love. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.

The way to disengage from the world is to love God most. As the chorus says turn your eyes upon Jesus look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory as grace.

So Chalmers again says this the way to disengage the heart from the positive love of one great and ascendant object is to fasten it in positive love to another.

Then it is not by exposing the worthlessness of the former but by addressing to the mental eye the worth and excellence of the latter that all old things are to be done away with and all things are to become new.

[28 : 43] We affirm how impossible it is for our hearts through any innate elasticity of their own to cast the world away and thus reduce itself to a wilderness.

The heart is not so constituted and the only way to dispossess it of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one. Thomas Chalmers is saying that the way to love the world less is to love God more.

When God takes his rightful place the things that we have and the objects we own find their rightful place. We must see that clinging to God loving God and obeying and fulfilling God's will is the way to supplant our tendency to love the world and to loosen the grip of the world and the things of the world on our fickle hearts.

If you are prone to worldliness what's the antidote? Love for God. That we might say with the psalmist who have I in heaven but you and on earth there is nothing that I desire besides you. And so the big message is do not love the world do the will of the Father. Do not love the world love God because it pays a far more eternal dividend.

[30 : 05] So how do we do it? Well I want to give you a mnemonic to finish and the mnemonic is tag and I think it works with worldliness because of things like price tags. So when we look at a price tag remember the word tag and the words tag are to remind us of these three things.

So when we interact with things of the world be thankful. Have a thankfulness within you that God you are the source of all good gifts and I thank you so much for providing this for me.

All good and perfect gifts come from the Father of lights who does not change like shifting sand. If we can orientate our hearts not to worship things but to worship the giver of all things that will build a far more healthy attitude to the world.

Thankfulness first one. Adoration. Cultivate your devotional life. Love God most. Love God most. Read his words. Spend time in prayer. All these things to fuel our hearts with love for God. And as our hearts are as full as an egg with love for God we'll find that worldliness has no room to creep in.

[31 : 17] I read this book. This has been the best book except for the Bible that I have ever read. It is unbelievable. It will do so much to stoke the affections of your heart towards God.

And so I managed to get them for two pounds each so buy them on the way out and I think you'll find that affection and adoration for God will be fueled.

Lastly, G. Generosity. Use your material possessions, money and resources to show that they're not your God. They're not your treasure but Jesus is.

Hold your things loosely so you're prepared to use them to further God's kingdom. There is nothing wrong with having a nice house but to think how can I use this generously in order to have people around for a dinner to cultivate fellowship to encourage them in their Christian life.

There's nothing wrong with having nice things as long as we don't cling to them so much that we think we could never do without them. And how can we practice doing without them by being generous with them and lending them and using them to further God's kingdom showing that He is our treasure.

[32 : 42] Let me finish by telling you the story of J.P. Morgan. J.P. Morgan was the first billionaire in the world. He had a ridiculous amount of money and this is what he writes at the beginning of his will.

Before he carves up his estate and gives it to his children he writes this Article 1 J.P. Morgan's will I commit my soul into the hands of my Saviour in full confidence that Him having redeemed it and washed it in His most precious blood He will present me faultless before the throne of my Father. That's a great attitude isn't it for a man who had so much? He said I count it all rubbish because the first thing I want to tell you about is that Jesus is my treasure and because of Him I'll stand before God blameless.

Don't love the world. You can't love God and the world. Love for the world originates in the world and the world is passing away. But if you love God you'll live forever.

It's a no-brainer. So let's pray. You have searched me Lord and you know me.

[34 : 03] You know when I sit and when I rise you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you Lord know it completely.

You hem me in behind and before and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful too lofty for me to attain. And so we pray search me God and know my heart test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there are any worldly ways in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.