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# *Whoever Does God's Will Remains (1 John 2:15-17)*

## *A Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow*

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I remember talking to my mom on the phone. I try to keep in touch with my parents pretty regularly. I remember talking to my mom once though and as she was telling me about something that recently happened to her, I noticed a couple of my son's toys on the floor. So, while I listened I started tidying up a bit. 5 minutes later I realized that I had said, "Yeah, uh huh," about 20 times and I could not remember anything that my mom was talking about. I am not good at multitasking.

I remember hearing about some study where they found that there is no true multitasking in our brains, really we more just switch our focus between the two things really fast. Our God teaches us a similar lesson in his Word. Our hearts cannot truly multitask. If we love the world, we cannot love God too.

Today, our God encourages us through these short verses from the apostle John to love God and not the world, because this world and its desires are passing away but whoever does the will of the Lord will remain forever.

Our lesson begins with "Do not love the world or anything in it." The lesson continues with "If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them." What does that mean? I love the color changes of fall. I'm pretty competitive and I love the excitement when your team grabs the win after a really close game. I love my wife, my kids, my family. Are these wrong according to John? Does my love of these things mean that God's love has no place in my heart?

We need to begin with some definitions: the first being, what does it mean to do the will of God? Remember that our portion of Scripture was written by the apostle John, who also wrote the Gospel of John. In this case, we can go back to his other writings to see how he uses different words and phrases. For example, in John 6:40, John records Jesus saying, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Doing God's will, therefore, is believing in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin. Christ by his perfect life, his perfect love for the Father, he overcame the world. Therefore, it is through Christ that we overcome the world. We can only have victory over the world by looking in faith to the one who overcame the world: Jesus Christ.

We are naturally of the world and we naturally love the world and the things of this world. Outside of Christ, the words "do not love the world" do not even make sense. The world and what is in it are all know apart from Christ. They are all we can love. Without Jesus, what is there to love other than the world? If we do not have heaven, then we might as well just live for the things of this world.

But Christ has overcome the world. He has won us forgiveness for all our sins. By his life,

death, and resurrection, we are assured of the Father's deep love for us. This alone gives us the ability to love God instead of the world. Therefore, doing God's will, that is, believing in Jesus Christ as proof that God loves us and as our power to turn away from this world, let us take a closer look at John's words here.

Again, we need some definitions. First of which is, what does John mean by "love" here? "Love" is sometimes difficult to define in English. "Love" can mean all kinds of different things. A father can "love" his son. I can "love" a TV show. There's even a song on the radio in which the singer uses "love" as a replacement for the "F" word. Our English word, "love" clearly can have a lot of different meanings.

Perhaps you have heard that in Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written, there are 3 different words for love. The love in these passages is *agape* love. This is the same kind of love that God shows to us. This is the same kind of love that God calls us to have toward our neighbor. *Agape* love is not so much focused on emotions but is more of an intentional love, a love based on actions.

God intentionally loved us by sending his Son Jesus. We can see God's love for us as Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins. Jesus' victory over the world by his perfect life, innocent death, and resurrection from the dead is undeniable proof that God loves us. This is *agape* love. This isn't just an internal feeling that God has toward us but it is a love that God expresses through actions. In the same way, God wants us to *show* love to our neighbor by what we do, not just by how we feel toward them inwardly.

So John is telling us that we are not to intentionally love the world by what we *do*. For example: most of us, if asked what was most important in our lives might answer something like "our faith, our wellbeing, our family." Most of us probably would not say that organizing papers or watching TV is most important for us. But if we count up the amount of time we spend on organizing papers or how much time we spend watching TV compared to how much time we spend on growing our faith, on taking care of our bodies, or on building our relationships, it's pretty easy to spend more time on those things that we would not say are important to us. If that is true for us, then we are really saying one thing, but doing another. Like if this example is true for you, really you are loving TV by your actions, even if you say you love our families more. The evidence is pointing in the other direction.

Next definition we need is the "world." What does John mean when he uses this word? John, in his Gospel and in his letters, uses the word "world" in a number of different ways. Sometimes, the "world" refers to what God created in the beginning, everything we experience with our senses. But notice how John describes the things of the world in our verse: "the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does." Here John is not talking about the world as God made it, but the wicked world of sin which is opposed to God. This is the world which Christ alone overcame. This is the world that we are naturally born into. This is the world which opposes God at every turn and calls us toward sin. This is the world that

is opposite of all the values of heaven.

So when John tells us “do not love the world,” he means that as God’s people, we ought not by our actions love the sinful world that is opposed to our God. As Martin Luther said, “To be in the world, to see the world, to feel the world, is a different thing from loving the world; just as to have and to feel sin is a different thing from loving sin.” So John is not forbidding us from admiring, appreciating, and rightly using the natural things on earth like our relatives and friends, our country, nature, our occupations and hobbies, or whatever other useful and valuable things that God has placed into our lives.

John is, however, warning us against anything that is hostile to God, to Christ, and to his kingdom. We live in a world promotes unity and even goes so far as to say that all religions basically say the same thing. Now, unity is a good thing, it’s something that we admire and that we want. But this kind of unity does not point to Jesus Christ as the one way to overcome this sinful world. It is therefore opposed to Christ. This kind of unity is a thing of this world. Love for this kind of unity leaves no room in our hearts for love of God.

I mentioned earlier that I love nature, I love competition, and I love my family. These are all good. However, if they become a stumbling block for my faith, if my hobbies or my relationships become more important to me than my God, they become things of this world. They become things which oppose God and his kingdom.

What does your routine say about what is most important to you? This is a good opportunity to talk about stewardship. Stewardship means how do we use the resources God has given us: that can be our money, that can be our time or our talents. But how do we glorify God with what he has given us.

In this case we are talking about our time and any time we talk Stewardship, we need to have two concepts clear in our minds: pie stewardship and slice stewardship. Think of a pie chart. You have the full circle and then you have a slice. So, how much of our time does God want us to devote to him? All of it! 100%! God wants us to spend all of our lives living for him and for his glory. But that doesn’t mean that we all need to have our noses buried in Bible and that doesn’t mean that we need to have 24-hour long worship services.

God wants us to “whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, do it all for the glory of God.” So if I’m organizing papers or watching TV, I want to find ways to glorify my God while doing that. If I’m at work or with friends, I want to glorify my God by letting my light shine in those places and activities.

Slice stewardship focuses on a specific portion of my time that I will devote totally to God. For example, gathering here with your fellow believers to listen to God speak to us. It can also be reading God’s word at home and talking about it with your family and friends. It can also be devoting time to this ministry here that we are all a part of so that we can help to spread the

message of how Christ overcame the world for us.

As people who do God's will, we want to watch how we use our time. We want to, on the one hand, be stewards, do everything we do for God's glory. But we also, on the other hand, want to devote specific portions of our time to our God as well. In this way, we can watch what our actions are saying about what we love most.

John gives us a very simple reason why we as those who do God's will should not love the things of this world: such things are passing away. Their nature is not to last. Their glory is fading, their flowers are withering, their promises are failing, and their hopes are crumbling.

The bank of this world has no actual money to back up its promises. Will we deposit our valuables in it? This world's foundation is tottering; it was never solid. Will we build our house on it? This world sits next to a rumbling, and quaking mountain, it was never anything but a volcano ready to blow. Will we build our city here?

John reminds us that all worldly possessions, appetites, and situations are passing away. They don't satisfy—they only leave us cold and spiritually dead. What really matters is doing the will of God. All who do the will of the Father will live forever.

And what is God's will again? God's will is that we believe in the One he sent: Jesus Christ, and through faith in him, we truly will live forever. That is a sure promise, a bank you can rely on, a steady, sure, and safe foundation. Therefore, as those who through faith in Jesus have overcome the world, do not love the world, for it is passing away. Love your God who so greatly and surely loves you. That will last. Amen.