



As we come to the fourth sermon in our Love Letters preaching series, we come to a section in 1 John, verses 12-17 that continue along a theme from previous weeks. That theme is “How does a person walk in the light?”

In 1 John 1:5 the Bible says, “*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*” The clear implication to these early churches in Asia Minor and to us today in chapters 1 and 2 is this—a follower of Jesus Christ walks in the light. So to instruct us on how to do this, the Apostle John gives further explanation:

- » Be in fellowship with God (1:3, 6, 7)
- » Be in fellowship with one another (1:3, 7)
- » You will sin (1:8, 9)
- » We confess our sin (1:9)
- » We obey God's commands (2:3)
- » Love your brothers and sisters (2:9-11)

It's as if John is saying, a person can't just “say” they are walking in the light and do whatever they want. No. Our actions, behaviors and attitudes reveal who we are. And God has provided what these actions, behaviors and attitudes need to be. This is a concept that we can relate to.

If someone said, “I'm a venture capitalist. I got in on the ground floor of the ... We'd say, “you are not a venture capitalist. There's more to it than that.” If someone said, “I'm really getting in shape this year. I'm an athlete. I've been thinking about this for a long time and I have decided, this is my time! So I went down to Road Runner in San Carlos. Got my stride and foot analyzed. Paid \$70 for some custom made shoe inserts that support my foot perfectly. Then I bought some \$100 Nike running shoes. Then I went over to the clothing section, bought some spandex shorts and poly blend shirts. I even grabbed one of those little running hats. And the sales clerk said I should buy one of those round foam tubes to roll out my muscles before and after workouts. Whew! I am there. I'm loving this! I am getting in shape. Reconnecting with my athletic self from years ago.”

We might ask, “What kind of workouts are you doing?”

“Right now, I'm working into it. I put on my shoes to walk around the house. And some mornings I put on my workout clothes to run errands and grab a coffee.”

We'd say, “You are not an athlete. There's more to it than that.”

This is exactly what John is saying in 1 John. Empty claims to be something don't make you something. Our actions, behaviors and attitudes reveal who we are.

In our Bible verses today there are more examples of what it means to walk in the light. One is a reminder designed to build our confidence; one is a strong warning of what to stay away from.

I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one (1 John 12–14).

In verses 12–14 we're told exactly why we're able to walk in the light. Six times it says, “*I am writing to you ... because.*”

Dear children Because your sins have been forgiven
Because you know the Father

Fathers Because you know him who is from the beginning

Young Men Because you have overcome the evil one
Because you are strong
Because the word of God lives in you

There are a lot of opinions about what these three verses mean. Why is there so much repetition in them? What do the breakdown of life stages mean? When John addresses “dear children” does he mean children, young Christians or all Christians, since he uses this exact phrase eight more times in 1 John and in those cases he's addressing the entire church. And lastly, aren't these descriptions appropriate for all stages of a Christian's life? What is being said here?

I think we can get clear answers when we look at the larger flow of what chapters 1 and 2 are addressing—walking in the light. The intention of these verses is to remind people who they are in Christ so that they are reminded that they can do it. They can walk in the light. The net effect of all of this is clarifying our ability to:

- » Be in fellowship with God (1:3, 6, 7)
- » Be in fellowship with one another (1:3, 7)
- » We confess our sin (1:9)
- » We obey God's commands (2:3)
- » Love your brothers and sisters (2:9-11)
- » Do not love the world (2:15-17)

Reminding us and reassuring us that saying “no” to the world and “yes” to all that's involved in walking in the light is possible. You can do it. Let there be no misunderstanding. The scholarly opinion I share is that in verses 12-14, John is simply using a rhetorical device to indicate qualities, which ought to be true of all believers, but they have specific emphasis during stages of life. “All Christians should have the innocence of childhood, the strength of youth and the mature knowledge of age” (Augustine). Consider what verses 12-14 say when we remove the age ranges and simply look at the encouragement they bring:

- » Your sins have been forgiven
- » You know the Father
- » You know him who is from the beginning
- » You have overcome the evil one
- » You are strong
- » The word of God lives in you

He's not addressing the person who mistakenly thinks of themselves as a venture capitalist because they invested \$25 in the ... He's addressing people who have invested everything and they are struggling with doubts. They are plagued with second guesses. Some days are really tough. What do you do then? Giving up seems like the right choice.

These verses are saying don't give in to the choice that seems right because it's easy. Stay faithful to what you knew was true when you were thinking clearly.

This message of encouragement is particularly important when we are struggling. When Karen entered her college biology class she had no idea that she was in for a spiritual battle. On the first day, her professor asked if there were any Christians in the class, and if there were any, for them to raise their hand. Unsure of the reasoning behind this, Karen raised her hand. She was the only one in a class of 300. For the entire semester, every class, Karen was barraged with ridicule and scorn from the professor.

“Karen, what does your God say about this?”

“Karen, you see the clear evidence for ... See how this doesn't fit into your opinions about the Bible.”

This was a dark and difficult time for Karen. She started to wonder if her beliefs were in fact foolish fables. She felt alone and outnumbered. She felt stupid. So she turned to the Bible to

hear from God. And as she did, she was reminded of the truths—you know the Father; you know him who is from the beginning; you have overcome the evil one; you are strong; the Word of God lives in you.

Turn to God for help. With his help you can walk in the light. This is the encouragement of verses 12-14.

I told you that our Bible verses for today provide more examples of what it means to walk in the light. This first one we just looked at is a reminder designed to encourage us, to build our confidence. The next one is a strong warning of what to stay away from.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. 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 (verses 15–17).

The warning is very clear—Do not love the world. What does this mean—don't love the world? The person sensitive to the Holy Spirit living inside them naturally wants to know the answer to questions like:

“How do I know if I love the world?”

“What does loving the world look like?”

“How do I know if I love the Father?”

“What does loving the Father look like?”

“What can I tell by the way I spend my time and my money?”

“What do I learn by analyzing my thoughts?”

Perhaps you'd prefer the Bible tell us exactly what this looks like in every detailed situation. For example, if the Bible just told me what movies to load in my Netflix queue, I'd do that. Or if the Bible would just tell me which person to help and how exactly to help them, then I'd do that. Just tell me exactly what to do. But that's not what God does. Instead, God provides guiding principles. In these verses, the guiding principle is love.

To help understand verses 15-17 we're going to ask four questions:

#1 – What Do We Know About the World?

Through its sin it stands in need of reconciliation to God

It is mankind in organized rebellion against God

It is under control of the evil one (1 John 5:19, John 12:31, 14:30)

It lies in darkness (John 1:5, 12:46)

It is under divine judgment (John 9:39)

The object of God's love (John 3:16)

The believer's situation is one of tension

What Do We Know About the Father?

He created everything perfectly. "It is good" each day. He is light—pure, holy. He is love.

#2 – What Do We Know About Love?

The first two uses of "love" in verse 15 in the Greek indicates that "love for the world" means "there is a pleasure which the person hopes to get from the object of his love." It's the idea that if I have that I will be satisfied. Or if I lose that, I'll be wrecked. It's the idea that our affections and our identity are thoroughly intertwined with something like a vine, wrapped around a fence.

What else do we know about love? Sometimes love is not so self-centered. It can also mean the outgoing care and compassion for someone else (1 John 2:10). In the third usage in verse 15, it means the relational aspect, "love for the Father is not in them." It is relational; it fuels your soul.

#3 What Does Love of the World Look Like?

In verse 16 God tells us exactly what love of the world looks like.

Lust of the flesh. Literally "the desires of the flesh." Primarily, this relates to the physical desires we crave, whether food, drink or sexual gratification.

My friend, pastor and former addict, Jason Cusick, has profound insight into lust of the flesh. One day he said to me, "Sometimes I don't want to know if I like something. What if I do like that drug, that drink, the adrenalin rush I get from doing _____, that sexual deviation? Although that is shocking and offensive to me now, what if I shock myself and actually love something that's horrible? Sometimes I don't want to try something new because I might love it and it will destroy me."

We have to be careful with experimentations that feed the lust of the flesh.

Lust of the eyes. The thought here is the greed that is aroused by what we see. It might seem as if seeing something is an innocent or neutral act but it's not. We see it and droplets of dreams land on our hearts.

We see a new luxury car and we want one.

We see HGTV and we want a remodeled house.

We see someone else's fashionable clothes, shoes, handbag, iPhone case, hat, jacket and we want one too.

We see someone with a flat stomach and we want that.

We'd gladly trade our mundane life with someone else's much more exciting life. We are deceived that if we get that we'll be truly satisfied, our dreams will be fulfilled. It's helpful to look at how much money we spend and ask ourselves, does this mean I'm looking for an item to meet a heart desire?

I always love it when truth is expressed in unlikely places. In Jack Johnson's song *Gone* he reveals the futility of looking for worldly items to fill our heart-desires.

Look at all those fancy clothes,

But these could keep us warm just like those

And what about your soul? Is it cold?

Is it straight from the mold, and ready to be sold?

And cars and phone and diamond rings

Bling, bling, because those are only removable things

And what about your mind? Does it shine?

Are there things that concern you, more than your time?

Gone, going

Gone everything

Pride of life. It means the arrogance our possessions provide so that we think our possessions give us life. The Greek grammar here departs from the format of the list John is creating to point out the "braggadocio, which exaggerates what it possesses in order to impress other people" (Howard Marshall).

For example, is it appropriate to spend \$1000 on fashion boots? How about \$5000 on an acoustic guitar? Or \$1500 a year in coffee at Starbucks or Peet's? What's an appropriate amount of money to spend on a house? Our answers to these questions hint at whether we love the world or love the Father.

What Does Love of the Father Look Like?

Focusing our affections to God the Father instead of this worldliness. We talk with God throughout the day. We think about his Word throughout the day.

Remember when I said earlier that instead of providing a detailed list of everything to stay away from, the Bible provides guiding principles? The guiding principle is right here—love the Father and then we'll love what the Father loves. The point is not to give us a list to check off but to engage us in a vibrant, fresh, spirit-filled relationship with the Father.

Last Sunday night while I was discipling the leaders of our Young Adult group, this topic came up in a roundabout way. I posed this question to them—What do you do for at least 1 hour a day, every day, that delivers content into your mind? They provided answers like: talk to my friends, Facebook, watch Netflix, news surfing on the web, sports news and statistics, listening to music. These are activities we can relate to as well. The question to ponder here is how are we being shaped by these influences? And how much influence does God the Father have on us? If we want to be more in love with the Father, we need to spend regular time reading his Word, meditating on his Word. When

we do that, we will start to love what he loves and hate what he hates.

#4 – What's the Result of Loving the World?

It passes away (v. 17).

What's the Result of Loving the Father?

"Whoever does the will of God lives forever" (v. 17). In order to help us walk in the light, verses 12–17 have given us two tips:

1. Remember who you are (verses 12–14)
2. Do not love the world (verses 15–17)

Do one of these tips land on your heart with power and conviction today? Did you need to hear a reminder of your spiritual identity today? Did you need to hear the warning to not love the world today?

As the band comes up to lead us in a song of response, you have a few moments right now to talk with your heavenly Father.

Perhaps read over verses 12–14 and allow the truths of who you are to wash over you. Perhaps confess your worldly loves. Let me encourage you to come completely clean with your heavenly Father. Don't hide, because he sees anyway. Don't be shy, because you are loved thoroughly. Don't close off part of your heart and keep it to yourself, because our heavenly Father is instructing us, do not love the world.

Is there anything you are loving right now that's of the world? I don't want this question to be so heavy that you're searching for the absolute largest, most embarrassing answer. Quite simply, the answer for all of us is "yes." We all have worldly loves. We are all struggling along, battling our flesh and the sin of our lives. And we should have the courage, as God's children, to identify what it is and confess it to God this morning.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.