

Can Believers Love God and Enjoy the World?

“Do not love the world or 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, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father, but is of the world. The world and its desires are passing away, but the one who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15-17, MEV).

This passage of Scripture is challenging to both Christians and non-Christians. At first glance, we possibly surmise that God does not love this world.

Of course, that isn't true.

Steve DeWitt described it this way: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. The desire of the “flesh” here is not physical flesh but the corrupted, sinful nature of man.

The Scripture is not referring to the physical world. We know that God created a world that is good.

“God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen. 1:31a).

Our key text is also not referring to the human world. God loves 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).

The Scripture is referring to the system by which the world operates. The Scripture is clear that the world is under the influence of the evil one.

That is not to say that all human acts are immoral. There is good in the world and good in people.

But good and God are not theologically equal.

Despite what people believe, there are unbelievers with strong character and strong morals. There are also wonderful people who are not Christians.

Just because a person is wonderful never means they are a Christian. The Scripture is clear: good people do not have an open the door to heaven.

Jesus is the door to heaven, and the Scripture says Jesus is the only door. The only people that enter heaven are those who believe in Christ and confess Jesus as Lord.

That is not just my personal opinion. It is clear in the Scripture.

“here is no salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31, NKJV).

“that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9, MEV).

Many see the world as immoral, sinful and worldly. The world system is viewed through three strands—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

These three strands encompass the totality of depravity in humans. This depravity is in everyone. No humans are intrinsically good. The Scripture declares all humans are lost and in need of God.

Knowing that humans are not good does not mean we have no value. It means we need God's love to discover the true meaning of good. God is good.

God's goodness comes clear when we live in devotion to God and serve others.

Jesus laid His life down for others and lived His life pleasing God.

The Contrast

The contrast of the passage is interesting. The love of the world versus the love of the Father.

God reserves the right for the "created" to worship the creator.

"Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind'" (Matt. 22:37).

God's command for us to love Him does not mean that God is a dictator. We must realize that God knows what is best for His children. Things go best for us when we worship, serve and love the Father.

When we accept Christ, we receive the Father. When we receive the Father, we welcome the love for the Father. When loving God is first, then loving the world is not an issue.

To love the Father means loving everything that comes from Him. To love the world means living for this world and finding our source of joy and satisfaction on earth. If we love the world, our lives follow the desires of the world.

The surest way to not love this world is to make sure you know God and His ways.

We cannot serve two masters.

"No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other" (Matt. 6:24a).

Christians do live in this world, but we must resist the world's influence to live through us.

Christians battle lust, pride and eyes of temptation, just like everyone else.

The "lust of the flesh" is desire centered in your natural body. Being a Christian does not remove the temptations of this life. Having Christ in our lives gives us self control over our temptations.

Paul instructs us in Romans 13:11-14 (NKJV) to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh."

The second phrase, "lust of the eyes," means to desire things we see. This temptation started with Adam and Eve.

"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasing to the eyes and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6, MEV).

The third phrase, "the pride of life," describes Eve's desire to be wise. This temptation for Eve and Adam was discovering something meaningful other than God. It was the start of searching for self-significance.

"Everything we desire to have, to enjoy, or to pride ourselves upon, this is the 'pride of life.' Everything from sensual pleasure and self-indulgence to self-conceit; the ungodly gratification of fleshly appetites, of mental self-satisfaction, of egotistic arrogance; this is the pride of life. All false views of pleasure; wrong views of possession; false beliefs of superiority; this is the pride of life," David Allen said.

When a person becomes a Christ follower, they become a new creation with new desires. The old, selfish, sinful nature is put to death, and God regenerates our soul.

This regeneration of our soul shifts our internal desires. Before being saved, we chased after soul-ish desires, and we craved prominence and pleasure.

“And He made you alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the [a]course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Eph. 2:1-5, NKJV).

After being saved, we become alive to God and dead to the desires of this world.

Does that mean we shouldn't enjoy the things of this world? No. But we must never allow earthly desires to control our passions or steal our allegiance away from God.

Our obsessions and pursuits reveal where our love is focused.

Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15, MEV).

Jesus did not separate love and obedience.

Lastly, loving the Father means doing His will. We cannot say we love God and live life for ourselves. {eoa}

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