

1 John 2:15-17

Clear Out the Clutter

One of our WELS district presidents tells the story of the time he attended a visitation at a funeral home. He had arrived a little early, even before the family got there. The lady that worked the front door was a 75-year-old woman who had moved to town to live in a small, modestly furnished house behind her son's home. She had been a woman of means before. She and her deceased husband had accumulated a lot of possessions from their travels. They once owned a large spacious home up on a hill overlooking their property of many acres. The woman said to him, "You know, it hit me one day that I didn't really get anything from all this stuff around me. Without my husband there it meant very little to me. So, I just sold it all. Everything! I sold the land, the house, and everything in it. Then I told my son," 'I just want a little house with only what I need.'"

Then her face got very serious. She looked at him and said, "Do you know what the funny thing is? As each possession sold, I felt a little bit closer to God. It turns out that all those things were between him and me and I never knew it."

As she said those words it struck the pastor. That's why the stuff in his garage and everywhere else in his house was getting him down. It was getting between God and him.

Friends, that woman learned late in life what the apostle John is telling us here this morning. **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.** She found cleansing as John's words became real in her own life. Her story made that pastor stop and check his own heart too. We too need that same cleansing. But it's not a trip to the garage or the basement that's needed first. It's a trip into our hearts and our souls as the Spirit calls us through the apostle John to clear out the clutter so that God might have his proper place. The opening words of our lesson might make us wrinkle our brows just a bit. **Do not love the world?** Doesn't the most famous passage of the bible...written by the same guy...tell us that **God loved the world?** Isn't it a good thing to have that same kind of love in our lives. Aren't we supposed to love our neighbors as ourselves? And isn't every person we encounter in this world our neighbor? Yes to all of that. But that's not what John is talking about.

The world John is talking about is the world in competition with God. It's the realm of Satan which later in this letter he says is completely under his control. It's the world with its sinful temptations and alternate offerings to God and his ways. It's what John calls **the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, boasting about material possessions...** in short everything that is NOT from God the Father.

So why did John have to remind God's people to **not love the world or the things in the world**. Well, in this particular letter...near the end of his life...several decades after Jesus had ascended into heaven... John was fighting a battle against a false teacher named Cerinthus. Cerinthus was an advocate of an emerging teaching that was trying to combine Christian thought with pagan, Greek philosophy. The results were catastrophic. This false teaching centered around several concepts, the most important of which for our discussion this morning was the teaching that the physical, material world was bad. Now that sounds potentially good on the surface, but the thinking went like this: the world around you is bad and counts for nothing. So it doesn't matter how you live your life. Indulge in whatever you want. Live however you want. What's important is your soul. That will endure. Do what you want with your bodies.

What was so dangerously missing in that destructive teaching is that those two issues cannot be separated from each other. You can't set your soul in a protective box over here, live however you want, and expect your soul to remain perfectly intact.

Friends, it's an old teaching, but it hasn't gone away. Do you find yourself compartmentalizing your life in a similar way? Yes, I go to church. I pray. I might even crack the bible or a devotional book during the week. But then there's those moments where God just isn't in the picture. We just kind of block him out. And we tell ourselves that ancient lie. This will not affect my soul. I can have both.

I can have the lust of the flesh... that's more than just sex on demand. It's anything and everything we crave to satiate our wants disregarding whether God has given it to me or tells me it's good for me. I can have the desire of my eyes. Anything I set my sights on and want. A career. A bankroll. A status. A possession. Whatever. Anything I can look at and want, I can have. I can have a boast about material possessions. I can find my pride and my self worth in stuff I have stored up for myself.

I can have ALL of that, on demand, in whatever way I choose, and I my soul and its relationship with God are over here, unscathed, untouched, pristine.

Do you see why John was so concerned with this destructive teaching? Because the truth is this: **If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** If anyone commits himself to the sinful desires of the world, then he has cluttered his heart and his soul and suddenly there's no room left for the Father himself.

Pretending we can compartmentalize our lives doesn't make it so. If we clutter up our souls with a love for the sinful things of this world, then we can't possible have the room to give our heavenly Father the commitment he demands and deserves.

So if it's getting between you and God, then it's time to purge and declutter your soul!

But you know what the problem with that is. How do I break the connection when my sinful heart clings to the world so desperately?

Look at how John encourages us in v. 17. **The world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.**

Can I ask you to think about something that might seem like a silly question? For those of you who are old enough, where do you look when you're driving a car? Ok, forward, yeah I get that. But that's not my point. Where do your eyes focus as you look forward? It's off in the distance a little ways, isn't it? You don't stare down at the road immediately in front of your hood, do you? If you did, I think you'd quickly find yourself in some real trouble. You have to look past where you are immediately to navigate the road safely.

That's what John encourages. If all you're spending time doing to staring at the here and the now, you won't break the connection between your heart and your desire for the sinful things of this world...and you'll veer off the road while you're at it. John says widen your perspective...get an longer term outlook than even the decades of this life. **The world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.**

We are living in a temporary world. Your life is temporary. All the things you can chase after in this world...are temporary. It might give you some joy...but it will only be fleeting.

but the one who does the will of God remains forever. And before you take John's words as your own personal motivation to hunker down in your spiritual life, remember what this same apostle wrote in his gospel, recording the words of Jesus. **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.**

Jesus gives the ability to take on that long term perspective and to break the connection of our hearts to this sinful world...because Jesus came, sent by his Father to accomplish what God wanted more than anything. He wanted sons and daughters who could call him Father. He wanted children whose sins, which separated them from him and should have brought eternal damnation...he wanted children whose sins had been washed clean. He wanted a family he could live with forever. So he sent Jesus to be your Savior...to be what you can't. Jesus was a man whose heart was never taken captive by the desires of the sinful world. He never lusted after or longed for or boasted about ANYTHING outside of the will of his heavenly Father. And then he took that perfect, innocent life and he traded it with yours. Taking your lusts and desires and boasts on himself...suffering their punishments on the cross, forgiving you, and gifting you the perfect life you never lived.

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. 40 years later John still remembered those words. **the one who does the will of God remains forever.**

Your Father in heaven wants your hearts and your souls. He wants them forever. He wants them so badly that he loved you when you were unloveable and sent his own Son for you. Don't believe the lie. There's only room for one number one in your heart.

So if it's getting between you and God, then it's time to purge and declutter your soul! Get that same cleansing a old woman learned late in life by look to Jesus and getting a perspective that breaks this worlds hold on your soul. Look to his love. Look to his salvation and his forgiveness. Look to his eternal promises. And love him, because he has first loved us. Amen.