

In but not of... A sermon preached at St. Giles Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC, November 6, 2016 by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: GENESIS 3:1-7

I JOHN 2:15-17

JOHN 17:14-18

In the reading Marie just did from I John, we find John resuming the list of practical counsel and exhortations to his readers.

John is anxious that his readers should understand clearly that he is not asking the impossible, Nor is he setting the bar so high that no one could ever attain it.

Remember

Your sins are already forgiven you

- You know God
- You have fellowship with Him and the Lord Jesus – owing to what God in Christ has already done for you.

Now with this morning's reading,

John reminds his readers of something that they are to avoid:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world (vs. 15)..
and so on.

Few words from scripture have been so frequently misunderstood or misinterpreted as these.

Why?

Because each one of us have a tendency to engage in self-defense and justification.

So the danger is to approach these words and to interpret them in such a way as to make ourselves all right and probably end in condemning others!

That is, we define 'worldliness' as what and often allow ourselves to see "worldliness" in a small section of actions or behaviours – not the broad definition John uses.

Take for example, a 75 year old maiden or widowed lady.

Never in her life has she drunk even a glass of sherry. – drink is worldly

She has never owned a TVset – too worldly to her.

She has never – oh, but never smoked a cigarette – again – a sign of worldly behavior.

Further, she tithes religiously

Her hemlines are low and her neckline high. And always in very conservative or earth tone colours.

She could never therefore be described as flashy or as mutton dressed as lamb.

What jewelry she wears is worn sparingly

Without fail, she is always at every service of worship and Wednesday evening prayer meeting.

But she gossips.

She is obnoxiously self-righteous

The rumours she spreads about the newer people in the church family are both inaccurate and damaging.

She calls the minister at least once every other day with some new and juicy bit of scandal.

"I wouldn't like to say....

Or, "you didn't hear this from me.

For her, being of the world is to indulge in drink, television, smoking, and probably dancing and movies and cards!!

Somehow she has convinced herself that it is not reflective of the world to gossip, be judgmental and unkind.

A perfect example really of what Jesus said in one of his attacks on the legalism of the **religious leaders**

²³ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. ²⁴ You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!” [Matt 23:23-24

You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!

Within some faith traditions and some communities of faith, A great deal of energy and heat is spent straining at gnats And allowing big things to pass.

Big things – a critical spirit, spite, gossip, back biting, anger, cutting insults – that’s just the way they are.

Now, hear me, I think one should always exercise moderation, in drink and in matters of entertainment – TV, books or movies

But to me, smoking is more about health concerns for the smoker and those exposed to second hand smoke than “loving the world”.

Lucy Maude Montgomery, Canadian authoress of the Anne books was also the wife of Canadian Presbyterian minister – Ewen McDonald.

And she disliked being the lady of the manse.

When Ewen would be resting on Sunday afternoons between a morning service and an evening one, or when he was going to be gone for a good portion of the morning or the afternoon on pastoral calls,

Lucy Maude would invite a number of local ladies who were also frustrated with their roles in their husbands’ shadows,

The curtains of the front parlour of the manse would be drawn,
 And gasp, choke, the ladies would play cards.
 And if a cordial seemed more suitable than tea, then that was served
 It is said that at time, periodic gales of laughter could be heard from the Presbyterian manse

Lucy Maude's journals published in the 1980's speak about these card parties
 And the old timers in Norval, Ontario – one of Ewen McDonald's churches – told Katharine on more occasion at Presbytery meetings when she was ministering in Ontario that this was the case – especially on Sunday afternoon.
 For after all Lucy Maude was definitely worldly – she owned an automobile and could and did drive it about town and went periodically into Toronto.

Cards, women owning and driving a car – early 20th c, Presbyterian sure signs of loving the world.

If we strain at what are essential gnats,
 Or if we introduce our own definition of worldliness to guarantee that we are all right and others are wrong, then 'worldliness' becomes the butt of jokes or merely a punch line in a story

We do not take it seriously

Yet loving the world or things of the world remains one of the important behaviours that John here addresses.
 For just as loving and hating a brother or sister in Christ cannot work together in tandem
 Neither can loving the world and loving God.
 For God's ways are counter cultural.
 They are not the world's ways.

Think for a moment what might be considered to be really of the world or worldliness today

- The quest for affluence

- The worship of success
- Crippling concentration on self – me, mine I

Ways of the Lord?

No way...

These things ignore God

These things – which truly are of the world – say God is not important

This life is based upon this world and this life only

Everything depends upon each of us

One of the most subtle ways that the world's ways move to God off the stage as it were is to make life so busy, so preoccupied with things to do, places to go, things to accomplish, that God no longer is a factor in peoples' lives, decisions and priorities.

God's love for you, for all others and you love for God is just squeezed out!

Just to be real clear, John goes on to amplify and highlight further three voices of the world

For all that is of the world – the desire of the flesh

--The desire of the eyes

--Pride in riches

– comes not from the Father but from the world(vs.16)

Peterson in The Message

**Practically everything that goes on in the world –
waning your own way, wanting everything for yourself,
wanting to appear important – has nothing to do with the
Father. It just isolates you from him"**

Get the picture?

Desire of the flesh

Such a person lives only for sensual gratification.

God has made us to need shelter, to eat, to drink, to enjoy sexual intimacy

These are perfectly proper and God given

The voices of the world though turn these perfectly proper God given gifts on their ear.

The world's voices make us believe that special food and delicacies are our right,

That only such things are important

To make us live for them and them alone, rather than seen as something special – signs of a giving and generous God

Same thing with a host of what I call creature comforts.

Oftentimes, God sends into our lives, the resources and opportunities to enjoy such things.

They are gift and reflective of a lavishly giving God.

The world says you deserve these things, you owe it to yourself, and you are entitled to them.

God gives to each of us the gift of sexual drives and appetites – which not only ensure the continuation of the human species,

But also allow us to experience the gift and pleasure of sexual intimacy.

Worldliness enters this God given gift and says – go ahead, indulge yourself in any direction, at any given time with whomever you wish.

After all, it is your needs that must be satisfied.

The desire of the eyes.

Ours is truly a world full of wonder and variety.

But how often the world and its voices turn this variety and lavishness into a spirit of covetousness,

Acquisition for acquisition's sake and pure and simple greed.

Seeing something does not mean you need it or even should have it.

But the world's voices are so persuasive are they not?

Pride of riches. Other translations say *pride of life*.

I wonder, is John saying we should not have a positive sense of self-worth

Is he saying that we should not be ambitious or take pride in what we do?

I think not.

Rather *pride of life* refers to those who have a heightened sense of their own importance.

Those who love to hear the sound of their own voices.

And haven't we all been subjected to that for too long these past few weeks.

It is wearing and exhausting isn't – that is *pride of life*

People who never miss an opportunity to say how wondrous they are,

And make every opportunity to show how clever and insightful they are,

They are dismissive of any other way of looking at a situation or resolving an issue – if they can't fix it, no one can.

It is an outlook on life where God and His ways simply are not considered.

It's all about ME!

That is pride of life – that is worldliness that is an outgrowth of loving the world and following its lead.

And that is diametrically opposite to the ways of God which are about service, helping others, compassion, forgiveness, grace and mercy, putting God and the Lord Jesus Christ first in all things.

Look the battle with the world and its voices will last all our lives.

The verses Marie read from John's Gospel say so,

¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.[a] ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.[Jn 17:14-18]

On some days and in some seasons of our lives, the voices of the world will be very beguiling
And we will not just hear, but succumb to those voices over the Lord's ways.

This is not because we are weak or faithless, but because we are all too human.

John's counsel here and the whole counsel of scripture really is not just for perfect, have everything together all the time people.

Rather the counsel is for people who know they are not perfect,

Who know they are very human,

But who want in God's strength and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to walk in the light who is Jesus;

For the alternative – the darkness – is just too frightening and we realize this is truly the case!