

Read. Heed. Proceed in the Opposite Direction

1 John #4

1 John 2:15-17

So, therefore, my brethren, set your minds on things above, not on the things below. Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you admonish one another with all wisdom. For the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

The Universe our Heavenly Creator spoke into existence is really something to behold. There are well over 100 billion stars just in the Milky Way. Our place of residence in that Milky Way weighs 6 sextillion tons. That's a 6 with 21 zeroes. Yet our Creator saw fit to tilt our residence on an axis of 23 degrees in perfect balance. That's what gives us winter, spring, summer, and fall. It rotates daily at the rate of more than 1000 miles per hour for 25,000 miles each day and 9 million miles each year. Had not our Creator tilted and spined our place of residence exactly as he has, the vapors from the oceans would move north and south, piling up vast continents of ice. If our moon was only 50 thousand miles away from us, instead of 250 thousand, the ocean tides would be so enormous that all the continents on our planet would be submerged in water. The mountains would be eroded. And all of life would cease to exist. That gives a whole new meaning to the children's chorus, *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands*, don't you think? That's precisely the reason why I'll never understand why we, the People of God, spend so much time enamored with the world and all we think it has to offer us and so little time enamored with our Creator who spoke our world into existence.

From Genesis to Revelation, the message of the Scriptures about our world and our place in it is clear. We are in the world, but we are not of the world. We are sojourners, travelers just passing through in a world passing away by the hour, minute, and second. That's why Jesus tells us not to store up treasures for ourselves on earth, where moths and vermin destroy. But store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. And that's why John will tell us today: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them." Friends, we often read and heed those admonitions and prohibitions and many like them as the People of God. But we often don't know how to proceed in them. Here's how: the best way to be in the world and not of the world, the best way to store up treasures in heaven, the best way to become more enamored with your Creator than you are with the things of His creation, is to read, heed, and then proceed in the opposite direction of the value system of the world. The value system of the world has four defining characteristics, none of which we, the People of God, called to incorporate into our lives. We see them in 1 John 2:15-17.

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1. The Lust of the Flesh

- **The Traitors Within:** (1) If this moment is Final Jeopardy and the clue is "Marcus Junius Brutus, Aldrich Ames, Robert Hanssen, The Rosenberg's, Benedict Arnold, and Judas Iscariot?" (2) What would your Final Jeopardy answer in the form of a question be? (3) If it is "Who are the traitors within?" You would be right.
- **About the "Flesh":** (1) The flesh refers to our fallen nature. It is the Benedict Arnold within each one of us. (2) It is the flesh that provides the tinder on which the devil's temptations can kindle.
- **The Lust of the Flesh:** (1) John, warns believers, with what has been deemed the unholy trinity. (2) It's a series of three, implying that all of the ways we fall short of the glory of God can be traced these. (3) He starts with the lust of the flesh. Paul informs us that we all know what the deeds of the flesh are. "The deeds of the flesh are obvious," Paul says, "sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:19-21). (2) John, however, refers to the "lusts" of the flesh. It's the desires that produce the deeds he has in mind. (3) Therefore, the basic idea of the lust of the flesh is something that is created by our own desires. They are not bad in and of themselves. But they become bad when we get "enticed" by them.
- **Adam and Eve vs Jesus:** (1) We see this clearly in the Garden of Eden. When they saw that the forbidden fruit was "good for food" they became enticed and sinned. It wasn't the desire to eat because they were hungry that was the sin. It was the desire to eat what was explicitly forbidden. All of the deeds of the flesh Paul references in Galatians are born from that. (2) On the other hand, when Satan tempted Jesus by telling him to "turn these stones into bread," it showed that Jesus was not ruled by desire, however valid that desire might be. He was ruled by "every word that comes from the mouth of God."
- **App:** What we desire in life comes from good and lawful emotions. But what is of the world, not of God, is when we become enticed by those desires. What comes from God is saying "Father, this is a desire. This is a need. But I refuse get that need and desire I have met at the expense of my relationship with you.

2. The Lust of the Eyes

- **Discovery at the Green Marlin:** (1) I discovered something on Mother's Day I never knew existed. The Sunday Lunch Buffet at the Green Marlin. Oh, what a glorious sight. (2) To a person, I saw the vegetables on the salad bar produce no smiles at all. You never heard a soul

say “oh, look at beautiful cauliflower. I think I’ll have the whole bucket.” (3) But when they saw the shrimp and prime rib, it was a different story.

- **About the “Eyes”:** (1) The eyes are windows to the soul. (3) When our eyes move off of our Creator, they fix onto something else. (4) When that happens, the soul becomes more enamored with that something in creation than it does with its Creator.
- **The Lust of the Eyes:** (1) If the Lust of the Flesh concerns desires that give birth to being enticed, the Lust of the Eyes add the dimension of possessiveness to it. (2) It’s the desire to possess. (3) It’s John’s way of saying “coveting” comes not from God, but the world. (4) Do you remember why Lot and Abraham separated? They were traveling as God directed them. They had herds and the land of the Negev could not support them both. They decided it was best to separate. So, Abraham told Lot to choose one direction so that he could go in the opposite. Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was fertile, so he chose it. Abraham got the desert. Lot’s land became Sodom and Gomorrah. The land Abraham chose was Canaan. (4) One land was born from the lust of the eyes, the other from the discipline of them.
- **Adam and Eve vs Jesus:** (1) Adam and Eve had a desire for food because they were hungry. So, they were enticed by the forbidden fruit. That’s the Lust of the Flesh: desire. (2) Then they went a step further. Because it was pleasing to their eyes, they took from the tree, and they ate. (3) Like Lot, they thought that all that glittered was gold. Turns out, they were wrong. (4) By contrast, when Satan tempted Jesus by showing him all the kingdoms of this world and their splendor and saying “I’ll give you all of what you see” for a price, Jesus did not succumb to the lust of the eyes. Consequently, Satan was defeated.
- **App:** Being led, like Lot, by what our eyes see is of the world. What is of God is disciplining and fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection is of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

3. The Pride of Life

- **Getting Passed in the Grocery Store:** (1) Have you ever gotten passed at the grocery store going down an aisle when you are not stopped looking for food? I have and it’s a bad feeling. (2) The first thing you do is look behind you. Why? Because you don’t want anyone else to pass you. Then you pull a Dale Earnhardt and block anyone else from passing you. (3) You want to win and conquer. You want to be the best grocery card driver Winn Dixie has ever seen.
- **About Pride:** (1) The Bible speaks more about pride than any other sin. (2) It is pride that comes before the fall. (3) It is the proud that God humbles and the lowly and graceful that he exalts. (3) There are four specific types of pride that God opposes in in the Scriptures: (a) Dignity – Being proud of your own virtue and telling people about it (like the Pharisees); (b) Superiority (like John, James, and their mother, Salome); (c) Arrogance – claiming glory you are not entitled to (like Nebuchadnezzar). (d) The fourth is mentioned here: the Pride of Life.
- **About the Pride of Life:** (1) The pride of life is the misuse of wanting to win and wanting to be the best. (2) There’s nothing wrong with wanting to win. (3) But when wanting to win leaves the bounds of righteousness, holiness, purity, and grace, it becomes the pride of life. (3) Look no further than Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome. All wanted to rule the world, conquer, and reign over the people of God in the Scriptures. None of those empires are what they used to be. Pride came before there fall.
- **Adam and Eve vs Jesus:** (1) Adam and Eve knew the pride of life well. They saw that the forbidden fruit was good for food (the lust of the flesh), they took what they saw and ate it (the lust of the eyes) because they deemed this forbidden fruit able to make them wise, knowing good and evil. They competed against God himself and wanted to win. And they lost. (2) When Satan tempted Jesus by daring him to throw himself off the temple in order to “prove” (which is always where the pride of life gains a foothold) that he was the Messiah, Jesus resisted. Why? Such an ostentatious and impressive display was not in the will and purposes of God the Father.
- **App:** Pride is of the world because it creates a need for vengeance because it is always seeking a way to turn the tables and come out on top. And it creates anxiety and the worst kinds of stresses. When we seek to be the best and come up short, our need to excel turns against us. What is of God, however, is not wanting to conquer, but be conquered by the power, humility, and wisdom of Christ instead.

4. Fleeting Investments

- **I Am Yours:** (1) I’ve been listening to a song with this chorus all week during my sermon preparation: I am a flower quickly fading. Here today and gone tomorrow. A wave tossed in the ocean. A vapor in the wind. Still, you hear me when I’m calling. Lord, you catch me when I’m falling. And you’ve told me who I am. I am yours.
- **Fleeting:** (1) Fleeting means “temporary.” Here one moment and gone the next. (2) When we put too much emphasis on that which is temporary, we are wasting time that could be spent on that which is eternal.
- **There’s a Reminder to God’s People about the World in v17:** (1) John says the world and it’s desires “pass away.” It’s a transitory verb in the language of the NT. It’s the idea that the world is a lot like us in one respect: It’s in the process of passing away. It has not passed away yet, but it’s on the way. The world is temporary. Therefore, worldly desires are also temporary and foolish.
- **There’s a Reminder to God’s People about What is Eternal Also in v17:** (1) “but he who does the will of God lives forever.” (2) “This is the will of God,” John says in John 6:29, “that you believe in One He has sent.” (3) Doing the will of God always begins with belief. It always ends “amen.” And everything in between is: “set your mind on the things above, not on the things below).
- **App:** “Heaven and earth will pass away,” Jesus said. “But My words will by no means pass away. May we never become so enamored with the things of creation – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – that we become less enamored with Jesus, Our Creator. Amen.

