

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.<sup>16</sup> For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.<sup>17</sup> The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)*

### Is the Father's Love in You?

When a woman says “I love you” to her son, does it mean the same thing as when she says those words to her husband? Of course not. It may mean some similar practical things – she may enjoy spending time with both of them, she may make tremendous sacrifices for both of them. But there are many different kinds of love. All those kinds of love are powerful. Romantic love certainly is. A teenager will work at MacDonalld's for seven or eight bucks an hour and then spend it all on a date in pursuit of love. Parental love is equally powerful. My mom expresses her love by spending too much on gifts and presents. She once took my whole family to Germany! Think of the weight some people put on, because they love dessert too much. All the different kinds of love are powerful. But they are not all the same. This morning, the apostle John writes to us about the most powerful kind of love of all: the love of God. His words pose a simple and powerful question for us this morning: **Is the Father's love in you?**

#### I.

John says, **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”** You can't have it both ways. **Is the Father's love in you? Has his love changed what you love?** God loved us first. And that causes us to love him. One of my favorite things about having babies was coming to get them out of their crib and seeing the excitement in their eyes and the smile on their faces and the pinwheel effect as their arms and legs waved back and forth because mommy or daddy was coming to get them. They couldn't say, “I love you,” but is there any doubt their love was real? Where did that love come from? It came from 2 A.M. feedings that never failed or left that child's tummy empty. It came from being sung to and snuggled and smiled at. For all that baby's life, it has been loved. Even in this sinful world, love causes us to love.

God has loved us with an everlasting love. Every day of our lives, in more ways than we can understand or count, our Father in heaven has loved us. We could talk about our families. I marvel every day because my wife and my children are such rich examples of God's love to me. We could talk about the blessings of work and prosperity. If you love your job, that's a real blessing. Even if you don't, by the grace of God, our jobs provide for our needs and more. Even in this lousy economy, how many of us still have cable TV? How many of us still go out to eat? How many of us still spend way too much for birthdays and Christmas? You could talk about our health. I am amazed that I'm now serving a congregation almost twice as large as my last church, but I spend half as much time visiting people in the hospital. Maybe you haven't been telling me when you go in. But in general, I think God has blessed us with a relatively healthy congregation.

All those things are gifts of God's love. But in this letter, John barely mentions them. When he talks about the Father's love for us, he's talking about something greater, something that's true for us, even if we don't have a loving family, or good health, or a job that supports us. John is talking about Jesus. In Jesus, God showed us the full measure of his love. God the Father gave his one and only Son to us and for us. That is real love. And he did it long before we did anything to deserve it. He did not give Jesus to us because we were devoted to him and we sacrificed everything for him and he just couldn't lose our affection. Just the opposite, he gave his Son for us while we were still sinners and rebels against him.

John says, **“For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.”** We are born with a love of pleasure. As we grow, the lust of our eyes becomes greater and greater. The easiest example of what John is talking about is sexual lust. Why do you think commercials and billboards use models in skimpy clothes to sell things? Why do you think that TV and movies and websites look for the most attractive men and women possible? Why does sex sell? Because our sinful hearts lust. But that's not the only craving of sinful man. We crave money. We crave power. We crave popularity. We want to be able to point at what we've

done and boast about it and we want people around us to be in awe. That's what sinful human love is like. It's all about me and what I want. That love is enormously powerful. It destroys marriages and causes wars and makes us compete with one another to get our share. That's the kind of love that we were born with. That's the kind of love the world around us understands and encourages.

That love spits at God's talk of sacrificing ourselves and doing good for others. Instead, it looks at all the other sinners around us and seizes every new and different idea for loving ourselves. In our natural state, God didn't find a baby doing the pinwheel effect in the crib out of joy at being with him. God found a sinner, screaming his lungs out because he wanted more than what God gave us. Justice demanded that he abandon that sinner in death and hell. But God chose to love us. He gave his one and only Son for us. He sacrificed Jesus on the cross to pay for all that selfish love that infects and corrupts our hearts. He sent his Son down from heaven to let the people he came to help, nail him to a cross, where he spent three hours of darkness in the middle of the afternoon while God poured hell itself out on him. God the Father did all that to take our sin away – to free us from its consequences, to give us eternal life and love with him.

That love of God in Christ changes what we love. When we hear about that love, when we understand that love means me, then God reorders our priorities. He puts a new man inside us who loves God first of all. God says to us, "Don't love the things of this world." No one whose heart is mired in this life understands the depths of the love God has had for him. No one whose heart is set on wealth or pleasure or popularity has the love that comes from knowing how much God has loved us.

My friends, has God changed you? Or do you have to admit that you still put this life first? How much time do you spend each week learning to know the Lord? Is this one hour a week a burden for you? Is opening your Bible at home something that never happens? Is teaching your children about Jesus something that you leave in the hands of the experts – after all that's what you're paying for with your tuition and your offering? That's not loving God. That's putting your convenience and your comfort first and leaving God what's left over. That attitude deserves hell itself.

But take heart, my friends, because God still loves us. In spite of all the weakness of our sin, Jesus still paid for us and God has wiped all our sin away! You will not go to hell. But my friends, recognize how precious that gift is! Commit yourself to a new attitude and a new way of living. Put Jesus first in your life. Hear his word. Study his word. Desire not wealth or pleasure, but desire a life that gives glory to him and dedicate yourself to loving God who loved you first.

## II.

John says, "**The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.**" John speaks in a very black and white manner here. Either your life shows you're a believer or it doesn't. **Is the Father's love in you? Has his love given you eternal life?** All that we can see is temporary. Nothing that we work so hard to achieve is going to last. If not in the course of history, then at the end of history, everything that we know right now will be gone, except for Christ. That's hard for us to accept because the things around us are so solid and real. Yet, think how much change we've already seen in our lifetimes. I'm 45 years old. When I was in the army twenty plus years ago, I didn't see how the Cold War could ever end. The Russians were going to be in Berlin forever. Yet, today, the world has changed. My dad remembers that he was riding his bicycle on the day the atom bomb blew up over Heroshima. His father grew up while you could still see horse drawn carts on the streets in Chicago. And he lived to see men walk on the moon. The world that he knew as a boy doesn't exist anymore.

But the changes we've lived through don't come close to the change that's coming, because the basic principles of this world haven't changed. Whether we live in Livonia in 2008 or in Egypt in 2000 BC, the lust for the things of this life is universal. The only things that change is how we convince ourselves that we can get those things. But when the Lord returns, all that we wanted in this life, everything that equaled success and pleasure here, will be over. And we will stand before the judgment seat of God.

John says that the man who does the will of God will live forever. Does that mean that if we're good, we'll get to heaven? No. God requires more than an outwardly righteous life. Doing the will of God begins with faith in Jesus. When I was in college, I lost my wallet at a summer festival in Milwaukee. I figured it was gone forever. A couple of days later, someone called me and told me that they had found my wallet. He was an Asian immigrant. He lived with a large family in one of the poorest parts of the city. He worked as a janitor at the fest grounds. When I got to his house, I found that even the cash was still in my wallet. By all accounts, a

poor man returning my wallet with the money was an honest and upright thing. But by God's definition of doing his will, it didn't count, because this man was not a Christian. The Bible says that all truly good works come from faith in Jesus. They reflect our trust in our Savior. That's what John is talking about here, too. He's saying that if your faith is real, it will affect your life. It will change your life.

You cannot claim to be follower of Christ and then live like a pig. We can't allow ourselves to slip into an easy, sleepy Christianity. "Oh yeah, he's talking about forgiveness again. I've heard all that before." This is one of the greatest threats to our faith because it's so easy for us to think the right way in here and then when we're out there, to think and feel and live and speak just like the people all around us do. True faith changes our lives because it takes the long view of life. It recognizes that the best that I can get here will be gone when I'm gone. The worst that can happen to me here only lasts until I see Jesus.

Now, it is true that sometimes, the outward actions are the same. Faith would also have refused to touch the money in my wallet even when we're struggling to put food on the table because that's stealing. But the reason for doing it is totally different. The Christian returns the money because he trusts in Jesus who loved him and who promises to care for him, even when he can't see how that's really going to happen. That trust is what it means to have the love of the Father in our hearts.

That love of God can't help but change me. I know we often wish that it would change us more. Every day of my life, I wish that I lived a more Christian life. I wish that I could conquer my temptations and live as Christ lived. Right now, the life we have in Christ is hidden. You can't see all that God is doing because we can't see past the dying world all around us. That's why the gospel is so vital to our changed lives here. To have the love of the Father in our hearts, we need to hear about his love, we need to receive it in communion, we need to confess and be forgiven. We need to remember that in our baptism, God washed our sin away.

Christ has conquered sin and death and hell for us. Jesus is the Father's great "I love you." That love does change us. It makes our love for God real and strong. It makes us that baby doing those pinwheels in the crib rejoicing in our life and our faith. That love is real. It is a gift of God. It will work in our lives here. It will carry us to eternal life. Amen.