

Thought 15th November 2020

It was that moment when all I had to do was tell a little white lie and it would all be okay. I was with two friends from church and we had just played our first game with the Falkirk Cougars, a local American football team. After the match as we were getting showered and changed one of the players, called Animal asked me if we wanted to go down the pub with the rest of the team. The problem was that the three of us had a Church prayer meeting to attend that evening. I could see my two friends desperately signalling me not tell Animal about the prayer meeting. Things got worse as my hesitation in answering started to draw the attention of the rest of the squad. The pressure to make an up an excuse or to lie about why we wouldn't go down the pub became intense. I was terrified by how my teammates were they going to react to me refusing their offer of going to the pub in favour of going to a prayer meeting?

So here we are back in John's first letter to churches in northern Turkey which were in crisis. A group of heretics called Gnostics had come into the church and were causing fear and doubt amongst the Believers. John was writing to the Believers to assure them of their faith and to give them three simple tests by which they could determine if these Gnostics were truly from God or not. Two weeks ago, we saw the third test was anyone claiming to know God and walk in the light had to loved their fellowman, even their enemies. John restates this idea later in his letter when he writes **1 John 4: 20** *"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen."*

John moves on in verse 12 – 14 to ensure the Believers that they do know God and are walking in the light. He then, with John's usual black and white manner gives a stark and slightly confusing command, *"Do not love the world or anything in the world."* This command is not actually a new instruction to the Believers. It is more of an encouragement to keep on doing what they already are. *"Do not love the world or anything in the world."* could equally be translated "Keep on not loving the world or anything in in the world." The Believers were already not loving the world. John had just pointed out in verses 12 – 14 that they were walking in the light they both knew and loved God.

So, let us try and dig down to what John is encouraging the Believers to continue not to do. We can start by defining the two important words John uses the world and love.

The world John is writing about is the world apart from God. This world apart from God is the world of man. It is a world dominated by man's thoughts, needs, desires and wants. It is a world preoccupied with the self, the motto of this world is, "It's all about me". The Bible is clear that the world of man is ruled over by Satan. Jesus Christ Himself, shortly before His arrest and crucifixion, acknowledged Satan's authority, **John 14:30** *"I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me"*. Because this world apart from God is reigned over by Satan, God's enemy, there is nothing of God in this world apart. It's values, attitudes, hopes, dreams and aspiration come from its ruler and have nothing in common with God. This world apart from God is utterly opposed and antagonistic to God.

Okay so we understand what John means by the world, let's look at what John means by love. The Greek word translated love here is agape which is a unique type of love. Agape love isn't born just out of emotions, feelings, familiarity, or attraction, but from the will and is a choice. Agape love is always focused on, concerned about, mindful of that which is being loved. Agape love almost always involves sacrifice, read **1 Corinthians 13** and think about the sacrifices you would have to make to show that agape love.

Taking our definitions of love and world we could paraphrase John's exhortation to the churches like this: Keep on not choosing to be focused on or concerned about or mindful of this world apart from God and don't be concerned with anything it says it has to offer you. Now, John is writing this because the Gnostic claimed to love God but to also love the world. These Gnostic's lives demonstrated all the fruits of this world apart from God. Their lives demonstrated all those sinful cravings from within that lead into immorality. They fought to get all the things of this world apart from God, they desperately wanted power, position, privilege and the good opinion of their fellow man. They were braggarts flaunting and boasting in their immorality and importance and wealth. The Gnostics wilfully choose to run after the things of this world, obeyed

the same rules, adopted the same attitudes as this world apart from God and so clearly showed that they loved this world, and this had a dreadful consequences for them.

John goes on to tell us of the dreadful consequences, *“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* Because this world apart from God is so utterly different from God’s Kingdom, they are mutually exclusive. There is no possibility that you can love God a little and love the world a little as Jesus said in **Matthew 6:24** *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”* James writing in his letter say the same thing **James 4:4** *“Friendship with the world is hatred towards God.”* You can either love the world apart from God or you can love God but never both. This was the lesson Jesus was teaching the rich young man in our call to worship, you can’t love of the things of this world apart from God and serve Him at the same time. John is clear that because the Gnostics are choosing to love the things of this world apart from God, they cannot possibly love God as they are trying to proclaim, they do.

So, what does this mean for us. We know as believers that we have been chosen out of the world in such a way that we no longer belong to it. We are aliens and strangers in the world we live in. We are in the world but not of this world. We know that we are not to run after or choose the things of this world apart from God. We know that we are to be neither conformed to this world nor contaminated by it. We know that we are sent into this world, as Jesus was to be beacons of God’s love.

It is an uneasy existence to live in this world apart from God and difficult not to end up loving it. I/we are easily seduced by all the blandishments, values and attitudes of this world apart from God. Too easily I/we find love for the things of this world apart from God have filled ours heart so much there is no room for the love of God. What sad unfaithful creature we are at times. But take heart John gives us two encouragements to help us to keep on not loving this world. Firstly, this world apart from God will pass away, it is house built on shifting sand. The day is coming when God Himself will call time on this world and all it offers. This world apart from God will be swept away and nothing will be left. This world apart from God is transient, temporal and time limited. All this world holds dear counts for nothing and is of no eternal value.

Secondly, John says that whoever loves God, that is obeys God, and not this world will remain, literally they will continue into the ages to come. Those who love God and not this world will live secure with God in His Kingdom, living in the light of His agape love for them. Did you notice the slight change in words John uses in verse 17 “*The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.*” John doesn’t say whoever loves God lives forever, no he says however obeys God lives forever. Why did John change from love to obey? Do you remember John’s second test or assurance of faith, if you obey God then you are walking in His light, you know God and love God? Do you remember John’s condemnation of the Gnostics for claiming to love God but failing to obey Him? John can switch between obeying God and loving God because they are in scripture synonyms. To love God is to obey God, to obey God is to love God. You can’t to do one without the other, you can’t love this world apart from God and love God.

So, did I lie to avoid ridicule and gain the approval of my teammates? Did I choose to love this world and value my teammates opinion more than loving God and obeying His commands? Well, I think the more interesting question is will you? Will you this week choose to love God or love the world apart from God. Which are you going to make sacrifices for this week? This to me is a much more relevant question don’t you think?