

January 17/18, 2003

## Torn Between Two Lovers

1 John 2:15-17

Pastor Bryan Clark

Last week we talked about the state of the church, and we unveiled our vision for the next three years. We explained where we think God is leading us, which includes the building of a new auditorium, a youth complex, the planting of the north church, a Christian leadership college, and planting churches in India. If you weren't here last week, it is critical that you get one of the campaign folders (they are all over the building) and read through it. Also, at the campaign booth you can get either a video, an audio tape, or a CD of last week's presentation. All of that is free; we just want you to know what is going on. But more than that, we want you to get *involved* with what is going on.

As part of the presentation last week, I talked about the fact that God calls us to sacrifice. But the reality is, sacrifice is really, really hard. We would all identify with that. The question we want to wrestle with this morning is: *Why?* Why is surrendering our finances to God so hard? Why is it that we can surrender every other area of our lives to God? We can be involved in service and committed to the kingdom, but we may have this one area that seems to be off limits to God.

Martin Luther once said that Christians go through three conversions: a conversion of the head, a conversion of the heart, and a conversion of the pocketbook. My experience would say that is true. But why is that? Is it a money issue?

Last week when I talked about the need to sacrifice, what was the response in your heart? Was there a little bit of irritation? Was there a little bit of thinking, *Why do we have to talk about these things? Let's go on to something else?* If so, I'm going to make it worse today. Why is it that we can talk about any other subject, but the money subject kind of gets us?

I don't think it is about money at all. I think it is much deeper than that. I think it's a reflection of a deeper value system, perhaps even a value system that is passing away.

Turn with me to 1 John 2:15. John says:

**Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.** (vs. 15-17, \*NASB)

The Bible uses the term "world" in a couple of different ways. Sometimes it's used with the idea of the world of people (e.g., "for God so loved the world"). John uses it that way a couple of times in this letter. But other times it is used to talk about the world system—the value system of the world—and John uses it several times that way in this letter as well. For example, in Ephesians 2 Paul says that Satan is the god of this world. He is talking about this world system, the value system.

It is very interesting to me that the writer says, "Love not the world or the things in the world." The world is the value system; the things are the expression of that value system. Oftentimes it's the things that reflect our values, so he makes sure he includes both.

He says if you love the world, you don't love the Father. Sometimes we feel like we are torn between two lovers. But the reality is, you can't have two lovers. If you love one, you don't love the other. Jesus said the same thing.

I try to imagine what it would be like if I went home today and I sat Patti down and said, "Honey, I just want you to know how much I love you. But I also have to tell you, there's another woman that I love, and I'm wondering if we could just kind of work it out so I could have both." Once I regained consciousness, I would realize that's not going to work! That would be unacceptable to Patti; it's unacceptable to God.

This value system is not just another value system—it's a value system opposed to God. I can't love them both.

What do we mean when we say "the world's value system"? If you go all the way back to the beginning, you find out in Genesis 2 that we, as people, are made in the image of God. And the ultimate expression of that is to know God—to walk in intimacy with Him, to love Him. To be in relationship with God means that my need for significance and meaning and purpose and love and intimacy and happiness flows out of that relationship. That's how we're made. That's how God intended it to be.

But we learn that sin enters into mankind and sin separates us from God. We still have the need for significance and meaning and purpose and happiness and intimacy, so it became necessary to try to create a way to address those needs separated from God.

Therefore, I try to figure out how I can feel significant and have meaning and purpose and happiness and feel loved and experience intimacy without God in the picture, and that becomes the value system of the world. So there's a value system that is without God and a value system that is focused on God. Those are the two options; those are the "two lovers."

In James 4:4, James says you need to understand that if you are friends with the world you are an enemy of God. He calls those people adulteresses. If you are friends with the world you are having a spiritual affair.

Oftentimes when people think about worldliness they think in terms of activities. They think if you do these activities you are worldly. And if you don't do these activities, then you're not worldly. But worldliness is not a matter of activities. It is a matter of the heart. You can be a person who does not do any of those activities and be worldly to the core.

That raises a question: Then, how do we know? What is the measurement? Jesus said the measurement is to look at how we spend our money. He said all you have to do is figure out where your treasure goes, and that's where your heart is. We will talk more about that next week.

Did you know that Jesus spoke about money three times more than he spoke of love? Did you know that Jesus spoke about money seven times more than he spoke about prayer? Did you know that almost half of the parables are on money or possessions? Why is that? Was God having a cash flow problem?

One writer says that stewardship is God's way of raising up people—not man's way of raising up money. That's right, you know. Money is just a practical way to identify what value system we have bought into, which is what we want to think about this morning.

I mentioned last week that this isn't about money, and it's not. But it does include money. It is about asking the question: What is the purpose for which we are going to give our lives? And the best way to determine that is to look at what we are doing with our money.

John goes on and basically defines the value system of the world. He says it is, first of all, the "lust of the flesh." Now oftentimes when we hear that, the first thing that comes to our mind would be the sexual, sensual-type sins. But that is really not what he is talking about. That is a part of it, but it is actually a very small part of the meaning of the lust of the flesh. What John is talking about is that consistently through the Old and New Testament, the word "flesh" indicates that which we can do *apart from God*. It doesn't have to be bad things. It is just talking about things that we are doing apart from God. So the lust of the flesh is basically that craving, that desire within us to do without God.

You could summarize the lust of the flesh in this statement: *I am what I do*. That is the value system of the world. I am what I do on the basketball floor. I am what I do in the classroom. I am what I do in the marketplace. I am what I do.

Religion flows right out of the value system of the world, because religion is saying, *If I do, I can make myself acceptable to God*. Legalism flows right out of the value system of the world because legalism says, *I can make myself more acceptable to God if I do or don't do certain things*. Paul talks about this in Galatians 3:3 when he says that value system is stupid. I don't want to offend anybody, but that is what he says: "You foolish Galatians." "Foolish" is the Greek word that means stupid. He is saying, "What makes you think you can do something and make yourself more acceptable to God?" That's the value system of the world.

If I buy into this value system that says *I am what I do*, then life boils down to competition and comparison. That is what defines my life. That is what defines my significance, my meaning, my worth, my happiness, and my purpose. It is how I compete. It is how I compare. Am I tall? Am I short? Am I fast? Am I slow? Am I lovely? Am I ugly? Am I successful? Am I a failure? All of those are based on comparison, and it is a subjective standard depending on who I am comparing myself with. Today I may feel really significant; tomorrow I may feel very insignificant. It just depends on who I am comparing myself with.

So life is driven by comparisons and competition. But that raises a question: If this is like a game or a sporting event and we're competing with each other, then what is the means by which we keep score? What is the scoring system? How do I put points on the scoreboard?

John tells us it is the "lust of the eyes." Consistently in both the Old and the New Testament, the concept of the *eyes* relates to covetousness. The lust of the eyes means I look at it; I want it; I possess it. We could say it is defined by the statement: *I am what I possess*.

That is the mechanism by which we keep score. So I am competing and I am comparing, and I have this kind of a house that puts X number of points on the board. I have this kind of a car that puts X number of points on the board. I have this much invested in the stock market or real estate that puts this many points on the board. I have *this*...I have *this*...I have *this*. And that is the means by which I say I am significant, I'm valued, I have a sense of esteem, I matter. That is what is supposed to make me happy—if I can get enough points on the board to compete well.

Watch the commercials on television—that is exactly what they are telling you. They tell you that if you own this car, if you buy this product, you get this many points on the board. And that is the basis of your significance, your worth, your value, and your happiness.

So on this particular day, I am not feeling very significant. I am not feeling very valued. I don't feel very good about myself. I'm not feeling very happy. What is my solution? I am losing the competition; I've got to put more points on the board. So I feel like I have to go out and buy something. I've got to accumulate things. In a sense, the lust of the flesh is the value system of the world, and the lust of the eyes are the things that are the expression of it. So I have to go out and buy something. Can I afford it? No, but that's not the point. This isn't about what I can afford. It's about my significance, my esteem, my value. That's why we no longer can tell the difference between a need and a want; it isn't about that.

Someone recently defined a need as "something I've wanted for three days." That's kind of what it is boiled down to. It is not about needs and wants. It's about me, my ego, my esteem, my happiness. It's a feeling that I need to get points on the board. That's why we buy houses we can't afford. That's why we buy vehicles we can't afford. That's why we buy stuff on credit cards—we're trying to put points on the board.

According to Crown Ministries, the average family spends more money in a year than they make. The average credit card debt is about \$5,500. The average family spends 23% of their gross income just servicing debt. Why? Why are we doing that? Is it a mathematical problem? I don't think so. By the time you are in sixth grade you have enough math to realize, *If I make \$10 and I spend \$11, I'm \$1 in the hole.* I don't think it's a math problem.

What is it? Is it a money management problem? No, let's not hide behind that one; it's something much deeper. The problem is rooted in a value system that I have bought into that is trying to define my significance, my meaning, my purpose, and my happiness by putting points on the board through the things of this world.

I've been reading a very interesting book called *The Progress Paradox*, written by a man by the name of Gregg Easterbrook. He is not a believer; he is not a Christian. It is a secular book. But what he is looking at is the fact that, by every standard of measure, the quality of life today for us in America is better than for every person who has ever walked on this planet. Yet we are depressed and dissatisfied and unhappy. He is asking the question, "Why?"

Easterbrook gives his formula: that we in America live better than 99.4% of all people who have ever walked on this planet. He makes the case that on any given day you can sit down and eat food that is finer than the kings of the world ate in the past. A person can go to the local gas station and buy a bottle of wine that is of better quality than the kings of France drank.

But according to the statistics, comparing today with 1950, we are ten times more depressed. This year we will spend 50 billion dollars addressing depression. We are seven times more dissatisfied with life. And he is asking the question: Why is that?

His conclusion is that basically the value system isn't working. It's collapsing. Now, if the secular world is recognizing this, certainly we as the people of God ought to. It just simply isn't working. It is very interesting that he did find there is one category of people in America who live a higher level of satisfaction with life. Those are the chronically ill and disabled. Interesting, isn't it? Why is that? Do you suppose it's possible that because of the circumstances of life, the chronically ill and disabled have realized they cannot compete well; therefore, they've had to find a different value system? And in the process they have found happiness.

That's exactly what John says. He says the value system of this world is passing away. He is not just saying that it will pass away *someday*. He is saying it is passing away *today*—present tense. In

other words, what John is saying is that this value system is not working, which is exactly what Easterbrook is saying in his book. It isn't working! It would be one thing if it worked great today but collapsed in the future. But it isn't even working today; it's busted.

So, what is the option? The option is a value system that is eternal. I realize that through Jesus Christ's death on the cross, I can enter into a relationship with God on the basis of *grace*, not on the basis of performance. It is based on that relationship that I find my significance, my meaning, my purpose, my satisfaction, my happiness, and my intimacy. It is all on the basis of grace. And because that is true, the pressure is finally off. I don't have to compete with you. I don't have to compare with you. I don't ever have to play that game again. My significance in life is not dependent upon you. And because that is true, I no longer have to compete with you, which sets me free to *love* you. That is God's value system.

One of the greatest truths in all the Bible that absolutely revolutionizes our lives and sets us free is to realize we no longer have to compete and compare, but we can rest. We can just rest and receive our significance and meaning and purpose and happiness from God on the basis of grace—not on the basis of our performance. That takes the pressure off.

Let's go back to the subject of money and how it relates to this. If you have bought into the value system of the world and you believe, *I am what I do and that is scored by what I have*, then you absolutely cannot afford to give. Because what you are feeling in your heart is: I am competing to try to be significant in order to find happiness and meaning and purpose in life. I'm competing, but I'm not keeping up. I'm losing the game. Therefore I cannot afford to take points off the scoreboard and give them to God.

If that is your value system, then last week when I talked about sacrifice you were irritated in your heart. In your heart you pushed back and you immediately dismissed that, because your value system says: I cannot afford to do that, because to do that would be to take points off the board. And I'll never be happy; I'll never be significant; I'll never be somebody. That is why we get irritated when we talk about money—because it hits us right where we live.

But let's be honest about something: that value system is not working. In your heart of hearts, you do not feel significant. You are not happy. You are not filled with a sense of meaning and purpose. It isn't working. That's what John is saying: It is passing away; it isn't working.

In Easterbrook's book he talks about a study done at Princeton University where they tried to assess the level of people's happiness. He said in the process of testing people, the initial response that people would give is, "Yes, I'm happy." But they had a series of follow-up questions that would reveal they were very unhappy. The researchers said they used to ask the question, "Are you pretending to be happy in order to mask the unhappiness in your heart?" But they said they stopped asking that question because so many people burst into tears.

This isn't about money. This is about a value system. And the reality is, the value system of the world just does not work.

The Bible talks about being a "cheerful" giver. As a matter of fact, the Greek word means a hilarious giver. Probably a lot of you wonder, *Wow, what does that even mean?* It's a different value system. If you love the world and the things of the world, you don't love the Father. It is hard to understand that.

Let's imagine that a group of people came up to me and said, "We want to buy your wife Patti a really nice gift, so we've all put in some money to buy this nice gift to give her. We're wondering if you would be interested in putting a little money in there, too." And I say, "I can't believe you people ask me that. It's so irritating! All you ever talk about is money! Don't ever bring that subject up again." That wouldn't really make much sense, would it? If this is a person I love, then it's a person I love to give to. I will give cheerfully; I'll be glad to.

Last week when I talked about giving sacrificially, be honest with yourself. In your heart of hearts, what was your reaction? Were you irritated? Were you pushing it off? Were you saying, "I just want to dismiss that. Don't bring it up again."? If that is the case, you have to come to grips with the fact that you have one foot in the value system of the world. And if you are a friend of the world, you don't love God. You are going to have to make a choice. You can't have two lovers.

John describes the value system of this world as the boastful pride of life. That world "boastful" means empty talk—empty promises. As a matter of fact, it was a word in the first century that was used to describe politicians. The politicians were full of promises they never intended to keep. The reality is, the value of this world promises what it cannot deliver. It promises that I am what I do and I am what I possess; and on that basis I will be significant and have meaning and purpose and happiness. But it cannot deliver. That's the boastful pride of life.

**Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.** (1 John 2:15-17)

That is true. That is why it is so important that we say, "It is for this purpose I live."

*Our Father, we are thankful that in Your grace You have provided us a way to be set free from the pressure and the stress of the competition and comparing of our culture. We know that our significance and our meaning and our purpose and our happiness can be found in You on the basis of grace.*

*Father, because of Your value system, we don't have to compete with our brothers and sisters—which sets us free to love them. Lord, help us to understand that the value system of this world is the boastful pride of life. It is full of empty promises. But we know that those who walk in obedience to You live forever. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

\*Scripture quotations are from the NASB (New American Standard) translation.

Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512  
Copyright 2004 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

January 17/18, 2004

**LifeGroup Discussion Questions**  
**Torn Between Two Lovers**  
**1 John 2:15-17**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

**Opening Discussion**

1. What is the value system of the world? How does this world define success? How is success displayed in this value system?
2. What is God's value system? How is it alike or different from the value system of this world?
3. Given your definition of these two value systems, is it possible to live out both value systems simultaneously? Why or why not?

**Bible Study**

1. Read 1 John 2:15-17. Compare 3:1, 5:19, James 4:4, Eph. 2:1,2. From these texts define what John means by "world" in 1 John 2:15?

2. What does John mean when he states, "If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him"? What does it mean to love the world?

What does it mean to love the "things" of this world?

3. Define the "lust of the flesh." Compare how Paul uses the term "flesh" in Galatians 3:3.

What does it mean to define yourself by the statement: "I am what I do"?

4. To define yourself by the statement, "I am what I do" is to reduce life to a comparison and competition. How does this play out in our culture?

5. Define the "lust of the eyes." How does this correlate with loving the "things" of this world?

What does it mean to define yourself by the statement, "I am what I possess"?

6. If success is defined by what I do, then possessions become the means by which I communicate my success. How does this play out in our culture? How do the marketers of the culture tap into this value system?

7. Define the "boastful pride of life."

How does this "boasting" explain why people have these huge credit card debts and simply spend more money than they make?

8. Why is it so hard to give money to God if you love the world?

The problem is not that we can't afford to give. The problem is we can't afford to give if we buy into the value system of the world. Do you agree or disagree with this statement and why?

9. What is the alternative to loving this world and the things of this world?

What does this mean in everyday practice? How will this be evident in the management of our resources?

10. What is the benefit of loving the Father?

## **Application**

1. Which value system are you living out each day? What is the evidence of your conclusion?

Does how you spend your money support your conclusion?

2. Which value system do you *want* to live out each day?

What will be necessary for this to happen or continue to happen?

3. What is the biggest challenge to loving the Father and living out His eternal value system?

What can your group do together to help address this challenge?

4. Pray for God's leading throughout the body of LBC regarding the *For This Purpose I Live* campaign.