**DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD**

1 John 2:12-17

Do you ever feel out of place? Sometimes I’m sitting at a coffee shop or in line at the store or listening to music at a show and am like, “What the heck am I doing here? Who are these people?” Just this odd sort of feeling of being out of place—“I really don’t belong here right now.“

And what’s more out of place these days than being a Christian? Say you meet someone for the first time and are like, “Hey, wassup, I’m Abe, I’m a Christian.” You might be shaking that person’s hand and you feel their hand loosen, and they retract their hand like they touched something too hot. Nothing makes you feel more out place when you’re at a party and everyone finds out you’re a Christian and begins talking to you like you have some contagious, terminal illness.

Paul wrote his 1 John later on in life, when he was an old man, to the young church he had been at in Ephesus. Being a Christian was a brand new thing. And it was weird to be a Christian. Ephesus was a Greek city, with Greek ideas—everything physical was bad and evil and everything “spiritual” was good. And so the heart of Christianity—Jesus—just didn’t compute for some Greeks—how could a physical man (evil) be also a perfect and holy God (good). So even the Christians in Ephesus thought being a Christian was weird, and as we’ve learned earlier, a good amount of the Christians left the church there.

So, imagine how out of place the leftover Christians in Ephesus must’ve felt, how very alone in their beliefs. Today’s portion of 1 John begins with John giving his reason for writing this letter, and he busts out with some poetry. Look at verses 12-14. He addresses them as “dear children,” “young men,” and “fathers.” He’s using the language of family, as if these people in Ephesus were as close to him as his own children. Undoubtedly this was to encourage them, but I don’t think this was just flowery, superfluous language. This was actually how he felt—he loved them as family, like his own children. Also a weird aspect of Christians that make them odd—why do we love each other so much? So many different kinds of people that, if circumstances were different, wouldn’t even like each other. But as close, or even closer, than family? We see that in how John addresses the church.

Let’s look at verses 12-14. In these verses we also see the common, core, bonding elements that they as Christians shared. And these aspects of what the gospel does to our lives are significant because they make us different than we were before

**Forgiveness.** All our sins, every action and thought, is completely pardoned and forgotten by God. Nothing we did. Think about for a second everything you ever did wrong. All the thoughts, actions—all forever forgiven. And this is because of Jesus. Because of what he did—dying on the cross as the payment and rising from the dead; making his payment eternally significant.

**Know God.** We’re temporary human beings but we get to know the eternal, God who was “from the beginning,” who exists outside of time and space. We get to know him personally. We get to see what he’s like in the person of Jesus. We see his words and actins and his compassion and hear his truth in the Gospel accounts. We hear God’s words to us in the Bible. We get to pray to him.

**Overcome the Evil One.** And we’ve overcome the evil one. The evil one is Satan, whom, the Bible says elsewhere, rules the kingdom of the air. And Satan’s rule is one of slavery, where everyone is controlled and shackled by essentially two things—sin and death. These two things, no matter what we do in live, rule us. But because of what Jesus did, we know that these things are taken care of, and Satan is already defeated So although we continue to live in a world that, at one level, is ruled by sin and death, these things don’t enslave us. We’re free. And this realization also give us strength to continue to be strong against temptation of living bound by these things.

So, as Christians, with a perspective like this, we become very odd. We’re completely different from everyone else in the world around us.

Look at verse 15. “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.”

This is our key verse. And John is being pretty extreme here, don’t you think? He’s saying, “Do not love the world or anything in the world.” This is the same guy who famously wrote, “For God so loved the world…” and he’s telling the Christians in Ephesus to not love the world or anything in it. Why is he saying this? Also, pretty intense to say—“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them.”

First of all, what is this hating on the world about? Isn’t the world a pretty place? What does he mean by this? It’s not to hate on nature or anything. The world represents this physical reality we exist in. It’s what we know, we grew up in, and before coming to know God or believe in the gospel, was the only reality we knew at all. But now, as we’ve talked about in the opening verses, we’ve been brought out of just living in the world—our sins have been forgiven, we get to know and be in a relationship with the eternal God of heaven, and we’re free from the power of sin and death. Things are different. As Jesus said to his disciples in John’s Gospel--

But, the thing is, and really the key issue of this passage and what John is trying to get at, is that old habits really do die hard. We have to consciously unlearn our love for the world. Because, before the love of God, we only knew loving this world. And the world can be very easy for us to love. Look at verse 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.” These three things are pretty much the three ways we love the world.

**The lust of the flesh.** This is pretty much what it sounds like. Physical desire. Living for just the flesh. Trying to feel good physically—this can really overcome us and drive us. I want to just eat some food. Because it feels good. I just want to have sex, because it feels good. I want to just drink, or get high, or really whatever, because it feels really good. Actually, these things of the flesh that world has to offer aren’t bad in and of themselves, but without God and just this existence, we can want to only live for this. And it can overwhelm us. It drives us so that it’s the only thing we think about.

**The lust of the eyes.** This is anything that catches our eyes. The word lust is the same root Greek word for luster. So it’s whatever catches our eyes. Raccoons are like this. And so are we. We gravitate to anything that is shiny, that catches our eyes, and we hold onto these things. “Oh that’ nice.” We can spend a lifetime just hording the shiny things and trinkets that we go after.

**The pride of life**. This is basically loving the world in living for my own legacy. How will I be remembered? What significant thing have I done? We even define ourselves but this. I’m so and so and I am a musician, or a doctor, or I’ve done this, or people have said I’ve done this. It’s basically thinking of my life and my bragging rights as a Wikipedia page. How significant am I by what I’ve done or accomplished?

These ways of living, the lust of them, or so strong. If we don’t consciously decide not to have these things overpower us, even as Christians, they will. But they come from a world that lives separate from God. And a world separate from God, living for my flesh, whatever looks good, and my own legacy all make so much sense, because we live and we die and if we’re lucky we get about 50-60 good years of life. If there was just sin and death, this makes total sense, even though meaningless.

But if this is not the cause, what then should we live for? Look at verse 17. The will of God. And what is his will? As we’ll learn more clearly in 1 John, and as Jesus himself said, it’s to love God with all our hearts and to love others as he’s loved us. It’s an outward life. The way of the world is every man and woman lives for themselves, and because of that, relationships all have an end point, and everyone essentially has an extent to their love, a limit to their love. But because we have the love of God in us, as verse 15 says, God who loved us and wants to be with us for eternity, our love becomes limitless. And we live an outward life of love. And this is the part of being a Christian that again, stands out. Jesus told his disciples, those men he chose to live with and love for over three years, in the moments before dying on the cross and leaving them, that they didn’t have to necessarily go out and convert and change peoples minds or argue others into believing or teach others, but that “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”