

## 1 JOHN 2:12-17

### INTRODUCTION

Having over the last couple of sermons already looked at a couple of tests that mark out the true believer from the counterfeit we want to look at a third test now. We have discovered that a true believer obeys God's commands (2:3) and loves his fellow believers (2:9-10) now we see that a true believer does not love the world. But before we look at this third test John addresses three groups of people within the church. Now who these three groups are we cannot be sure.

Is John writing to three different age groups within the church? Is he writing to three groups based on their spiritual maturity or is he referring to the whole church when he calls them little children and then divides the church up into two groups Fathers being the older members either older in the faith or older in age and the young men being the rest of the church. There are some who think that fathers refers to those in leadership and young men being potential leaders.

The truth is we do not know; my own guess is that he is talking about different groups depending on their spiritual maturity. Fathers being the more mature; young men being those less mature and dear children being those who are very young in the faith. Whoever these groups are what John says to them is relevant to the whole church and therefore no matter what group we fit into all that is said in this section is relevant to us whether we are old or young in age or faith. The link between these verses and what has gone before and what is to follow is that John is outlining convictions that true believers hold. Therefore every true believer knows that their sins have been forgiven and that they know the eternal Christ, and as a result have overcome the evil one.

### 1. CONVICTIONS HELD BY TRUE BELIEVERS

a) Sins forgiven (vs. 12-13) – We belong to God only because our sins are forgiven and that has happened on account of his name that is the name of Jesus Christ. The result of having our sins forgiven is that we know God (v 13). Now if these dear children are in fact young and immature believers then such people need to be reminded that their sins have been forgiven. It is this group within the church that very often is troubled with lack of assurance

If the false teachers were teaching the need to know God through some sort of spiritual experience then these young believers could be tempted to think that because they have not had such an experience then they cannot be believers and they are still in their sins. What they need to hear is that their sins are forgiven not because of some sort of spiritual experience but because of Jesus and his work on the cross for them. What every believer needs is to have a firm conviction that our sins are forgiven because of Jesus.

If as some of the more extreme charismatic groups do question our salvation because we are not experiencing God in the way that they say we should experience God then we need to point to Jesus Christ and be convinced that our sins are

forgiven because of him and not because of anything else. We do know God through Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you are your sins forgiven? How do you know they are forgiven? If you are a believer tonight even a very young believer you need to have a very strong conviction that your sins are forgiven on the basis of Christ. If you give any other reason why you believe your sins are forgiven other than Christ and his death on your behalf, then you do not understand the gospel of God's grace. Because our sins are forgiven through Christ then we can have confidence that we know God. He is our Father (v 13)

**b) Jesus Christ is God (v 13-14)** John writing to "fathers" emphasises their knowledge of Christ. They know him as the eternal and pre-existent God. These more mature believers (who were possibly leaders in the church) have known that Jesus is God and that is what enables him to accomplish his work of salvation. It seems that the false teachers were teaching that Jesus is not God (or at least they believed he was God only while he walked this earth) perhaps these more mature people in the faith were being swayed by this false teaching and they needed to be reminded by John that the deity of Christ is the core truth of their salvation.

It is because Jesus is God that He is able to provide salvation for those who believe. This is a conviction held by those who are true believers and must be maintained and passed on by these more mature believers that John is writing too. We are no different we need to constantly hold to this truth and see it as evidence that we are saved. When those nice Jehovah Witnesses come round and present what seems good evidence to prove that Jesus is not God then we must not be shaken, we must not assume that these people are true believers or to question our own salvation.

We need to assure ourselves time and time again that this teaching is a core truth of true Christianity. If anyone denies such teaching they do not know God they are not believers. The false teachers of John's day seem so plausible they seemed to know God but John is simply encouraging the believers to look beyond what they are saying and look at the core central truth of the deity of Christ. If they do not believe that; then they are not believers and are false. So we too must look beyond the nice well mannered nature and the very plausible teaching of groups like the Jehovah Witnesses and ask do they believe Jesus is God for without that teaching there is no salvation.

**c) Victory over Satan (vs. 13-14).** – In writing to the young men who I take to be those who are between very young and mature believers perhaps this covered vast majority of the congregation. They needed to be reminded to hold a firm conviction on the fact that victory over Satan has been accomplished. They need to remember that they have been rescued from Satan's grip and he has no power or control over them. These young men are strong in the faith and the evidence of their strong faith is that God's word lives in them and as a result they have overcome the world.

Of course they have not overcome the evil one in their own power the verb that is used is a verb with continual present consequences. They have overcome the evil one because Christ has overcome him (3:8) and he empowers true believers by his Spirit. This victory although wrought by Christ has to be fought on a daily basis and it

is done by allowing God's word to shape our lives this is what is meant by the word of God living in you.

This instruction by John has probably come because of the false teachers emphasis on their spiritual experiences. They claimed to know God through a special anointing and one of the consequences is that they probably claimed victory over the evil one. They no longer sin therefore they have gained the complete victory over the evil one (1:8). When this group of believers in the church sinned they grieved over their sin and longed to overcome it.

The temptation was to follow the teaching of the false teachers, to know complete victory might well be how it was put. I don't want to labour this point but again there are some Christian groups who talk in similar language and claim to have complete victory over the evil one. John reminds us, and those in the church at Asia Minor that victory is already won that we have already overcome the evil one through the death of Jesus.

We are on the victory side and therefore what we need is to continue to bring our life into line with God's word so that his principles become our guide throughout life.

These three convictions are central to true faith; we need to remind ourselves of them constantly for we are tempted to follow new ideas and new teachings. But the true believer has firm convictions about forgiveness of sin, about who Jesus Christ is and about what He has accomplished on behalf of his people. If we keep these core truths central in our lives then we will have assurance of faith and firm convictions to resist those who teach differently.

## 2. TRUE BELIEVERS DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD (vs. 15-17)

It is one thing to hold to the right convictions but all that we believe must be reflected in how we live. Having had a little interlude in order to address particular groups within the church about their convictions John now gets back to the next test of ascertaining true from false belief. True believers do not sit loosely with sin, to obey his commands means loving not the world. But what does John mean by the term 'world.' Obviously the word is used in different ways in the bible God is said to love the world (John 3:16) and yet we are now being told not to love it.

The word as it is being used in this context represents the organised system of human civilisation and activity, which is opposed to God and alienated from him It represents anything that prevents mankind from loving God. This is why there is a contrast in these verses; to love the world is not to love God and to love God is not to love the world. The two are complete opposites. Yet to be truthful you would not always think that, if you look at some Christians in our modern world.

Our problem today is that we tend to water down this demand we think that we can love the world and God or at least we think we can love the world a little bit. After all we might argue what is wrong with it. The world is full of attractions it appeals to us and so often as we look at the alternative it looks so disappointing and boring. Well John goes on in verse 16 and defines more clearly what he means by the phrase 'anything in the world.'

It is obvious I trust that he is not thinking about things in themselves such as money or possessions. These things are morally neutral its our approach to them that decides if we love the world or love the Father.

John is thinking about our attitude to the things of the world. What is it that affects our approach and attitude to the world? It's what's inside us its how we view things its how we handle the things of this world. Worldliness has little to do with the places you go and the things you do but it is more to do with our motives, attitudes and affections as we do what we do in this world. Worldliness is giving in to our sinful cravings (v 16). Loving the world is allowing our craving and desires to dictate and control our lives.

The world which is opposed to God questions God, it suggests that God cannot be trusted that his word cannot be depended upon and he a spoilsport from whom we need to break free and really start living. Go on give in to that inner sinful desire and really start living a bit is the voice of the world. The devil uses our natural appetites to trap us he uses the allure of this world to ensnare us, and lead us into love for the world.

Loving the world is the sort of thing you find in any city, town and village on any given night. It is giving in to sinful desires that go against God's commands. That's why you cannot love God and the world one is opposed to the other.

Worldliness is being controlled by our cravings and passions instead of controlling them. Worldliness is giving free reign to those cravings believing that to do so is to really live.

The Christian is someone who learns to say no to temptation who is able to resist the cravings of a sinful nature and is someone who chooses freely to follow God's ways rather than follow our sinful impulses and appetites. Worldliness is also to lust after what we see and to see those things as the be all and end all rather than having our eyes of faith fixed upon our heavenly Father (v 16). The world makes everything appealing and entertaining, it encourages us to give in to what we really desire.

So sex is presented as something that is natural to do and it is just fulfilling our natural instinct and passion. It is not portrayed as an act of love within the marriage relationship. The world tells us that it is OK to covet, if you see it and want it then why not go out and get. It is the lust of the eyes that the advertising media prey on. As Christians living in a wealthy consumer crazy culture we need to constantly be judging our own reaction to covetousness, which so often affects our attitudes to things of this world.

Only you can ultimately be the judge of these things because someone buys a new car or new gadget for the home does not mean that person is being worldly. It is what lies behind that purchase it is their thinking and attitude towards that item that will decide whether they love the world rather than God. You can be the thriftiest person in the world and deny yourself many good things and yet be in love with the world.

Worldliness is in the heart, yes it is reflected in how we live but it starts and grows within one's heart. Are we giving in to those cravings and are we lusting after those things we see, if so then the truth is that we are worldly and we cannot love the Father. Our problem is that we give in just a little bit and feel it does us no harm and does not affect our relationship with God. But we are so wrong for love for the world and love for the Father are two opposites.

The third way that worldliness is reflected is through boasting of what one has or does (v 16). God gives us everything to enjoy possessions are God's gracious gifts to mankind, we are right to enjoy them but they are his gifts, we are to use what he has given to us as good stewards and use what we have for his glory and not for our own self gratification. We are not to boast about what we have or what we have achieved. In truth by nature we are always eager to impress and be one up on others.

When we hear of the achievements of others there is something in us that wants to tell of our own achievements. We can so often be concerned about our status in life or our image; how others view us which at the end of the day is a form of worldliness we want to be up there with the best of them. We might never let pass an opportunity to exalt ourselves or those close to us or miss an opportunity to put others down. All of this is no way for a Christian to live it is worldliness and is opposite to God and his ways.

Finally John gives us reasons for not loving the world.

### 3. REASONS FOR NOT LOVING THE WORLD.

He gives us two reasons and one of them I have already dealt with in some measure.

**a) We cannot serve two Masters.** Either we are motivated by love for God or love for the world it cannot be both. This is why we are to resist our sinful craving and our lustful attitudes and our desire to boast. The world is opposed to God we cannot serve both God and the world. It hinders our walk with God it will lead us into sin and it will steal our affections from God. So the question comes who are we serving?

How many times have we given our hearts to the world instead of to God, how many times have we served this world rather than God. To assess ourselves we have to look at our motives and attitudes and reasoning in order to ascertain where our heart truly lies. We have to choose to love God or the world we cannot do both, yet so many of us want both.

**b) The world is only temporary (v 17)** The world passes away all that we might consider important will pass away but the man who does God's will lives forever. Doing God's will is loving the Father rather than the world. It is attaching oneself to God through Jesus Christ. This verse is simply saying that those who love the Father will enjoy that eternal life that we receive through Jesus whereas those who love the world may spend years seeking satisfaction and fulfilment in this world but at the end of the day it will all come to nothing it all ultimately leads to hell.

Why invest your life in the world, which is doomed why give your heart to something that will not last (2 Corinthians 4:18). We are heading for somewhere better than this world therefore do not love this world but love the Father for ultimately when it boils down to it only those who love the Father will ultimately find fulfilment and satisfaction in life.

Amen