DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD

1 John 2:15-17

Key Verse: 2:15

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

In the last lesson, we thought of Jesus our advocate, who himself is the atoning sacrifice/propitiation for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. We also thought of the importance of obeying God’s word, particularly loving our brothers with no hatred at all, whatever the reason, so that we can walk as Jesus did. Today, we want to ponder on three verses 2:1-17, entitled “Do not love the world.” In this message, prior to that, we will further expound on Jesus being the atoning sacrifice and our advocate.

Apostle John wrote in 2:1b-2, “If anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice/propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” He again wrote in 4:10, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice/propitiation for our sins.” In the Old Testament, countless animals were killed and sacrificed because of man’s sins. Animal sacrifice is understandable, though it must have been very painful for those who had to kill the animals and make the sacrifice. The sacrifice of the animals was the shadow of the sacrifice of Christ Jesus for our sins. Colossians 2:17 says, “There are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” Also, Hebrews 10:1 says, “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves.” And Hebrews 10:4 says, “…it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” God prepared the whole sacrifice system in the Old Testament for the reality of sacrificing his own Son as the atonement for our sins. Then at the right time in history God sent his Son into this world. Galatians 4:4 says, “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son born of a woman…”. In the NIV 2011 translation, it says, “But when the set time had fully come…” and in KJV, “But the fullness of the time had come…” The Son came with flesh and blood to share in the humanity of his people and finally die as the atoning sacrifice. It was so unbearable that the Son of God cried out on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This was the cry of the Son who had been fully trusting God the Father God. This cry was surely out of his great physical pain and more than that his great spiritual agony and burden to take upon himself our sins and the sins of the whole world. He was indeed momentarily forsaken by God so that we might not be forsaken eternally. His being the atoning sacrifice/propitiation shows God’s perfect holiness and righteousness, which drove him to pour out his wrath upon his own Son, the only one, who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners. Nothing was acceptable except the sacrifice of the innocent Son as the perfect offering without blemish to appease God’s wrath. Also, this atoning sacrifice of the Son Christ Jesus shows the seriousness of our sin that would plunge us into the eternal punishment of God of the lake of fire but for the sacrifice of atonement. This is truly love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice.

His coming in flesh and dying on the cross was the apex of human history. It was “once for all” event in the history of mankind. Apostle Paul said in Romans 6:10, “The death he died, he died to sin once for all…” Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” The author of Hebrews said in 7:27, “…He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself” and in 9:26, “…But now he has appeared once for all at the end/culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Christianity is based on history. Christ Jesus being the atoning sacrifice happened once in history and this is effective to all people of all generations to the end of the age. This is a one time event in the eternal plan of God for his redemption. He is the atoning sacrifice now and till the end of the time. Because of this sacrifice of his own he is our advocate with the Father who is completely holy and righteous.

Christ Jesus as the atoning sacrifice and our advocate is to be the very heart of our faith, and this grace of Jesus Christ should be alive in our present Christian life. Last Monday, I heard my message preached last Sunday. It did not touch my heart as much as I anticipated. I was greatly discouraged. I found that my heart had become proud. I have gone through many failures in serving the ministry of God’s word. When I cried out to him with a humble broken heart, he gave me his words and enabled me to serve the ministry of God’s word. This was God’s grace, despite my total unworthiness. However, I easily become loosed in heart and insensitive in my spirit, forgetting my unworthiness and lacking a broken and contrite heart. Then I become superficial to the precious words of God and the same words of God do not move my heart. I repented of my sin coming to my advocate remembering his atoning sacrifice for my sins. I realize anew that it is a tragedy that we cannot come to our advocate with a broken spirit and a contrite heart although we are in spiritual poverty and wretchedness. It is a pitiful thing that we cannot mourn over our sins and the sins of our beloved ones. Truly blessed are the poor in spirit, and blessed are those who mourn. They can come to the advocate, relying on his atoning sacrifice. We are all proud and stubborn. We do not want correction. We want to do what we like to do, not what we have to do. Remembering his atoning sacrifice of our sins, we may be able to come to our advocate with our failures and weakness and sins, sin of pride, lust, jealousy, self-dependency, worry and unbelief. Let’s remember that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all sin and unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his words has no place in our lives. It is a dreadful that God’s word has no place in our lives and we cannot continue true fellowship with the Father and with Son and with one another. Then our Christian fellowship is deadened. May God have mercy on me and each of his people to be aware of this and really come to our advocate at each time, being forever thankful that he is tthe atoning sacrifice for our sins and for the sins of the whole world and so dwell in his love.

Now, let’s look at today’s passage, 2:15-17: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 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. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” Let’s think of these words into three parts, “Do not love the world”, “Everything in the world” and “What is passing away and what is forever.”

**First, “Do not love the world” (15).** Verse 15 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.” We need to understand this command correctly. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” In this case of John 3:16, God loved the people of the world to save them, not giving them up to be condemned and punished eternally due to their sins. Yet, here in 1 John 2:15, when John said, “Do not love the world or anything in the world,” we should understand what world he had in mind. It is not the world God created. The world God made is good. A Psalmist said in Psalm 104: 24, “How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.” In his creation, God revealed his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature (Ro. 1:20). When Isaiah met the holy God, the LORD Almighty, he confessed, “…the whole earth is full of your glory” (Isa. 6:3) Again, the world John is talk about is certainly not the world God created. It is not the physical world. In the very next verse, in 2:18, John mentions antichrist, saying, “…this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come...” In John’s gospel, Jesus told about the prince of this world 3 times, in 12:31, “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out”, in 14:30, “I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming”, and in 16:11, “in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.” The prince of this world is Satan or the devil. Of course, Jesus defeated the devil through his death and resurrection. So those who believe in Jesus are not under the rule of Satan. Yet, the world, the unbelieving world, is under his control. 1 John 5:19 says, “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”

When John wrote, “Do not love the world or anything in the world”, he is talking about this world, the world under the control of the evil one. This world is rebelling against God, thwarting God’s plan of saving the people of the world. As we studied in Revelation 12:9, the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, leads the whole world astray. Apostle Paul also said in 2 Corinthians 4:4, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” And he also said in Ephesians 2:1-2, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” The god of this age and the ruler of the kingdom of the air all refer to Satan, the prince of this world. We should have a clear view of the world based on the words of the Scriptures and have eyes to see the world under his control. When we cannot see this, we are deceived by him, who leads the whole world astray.

So when John said, “Do not love the world…”, the world must mean the organization and the mind and the outlook of mankind as it ignores God and does not recognize him. It is the whole outlook upon life that is exclusive of God. According to Revelation, the world under the control of the evil one refers to Babylon, the worldwide empire of Satan. This kingdom of Babylon is represented by the great prostitute, the mother of the prostitutes, turning the inhabitants of the world away from the true God, and represented by Babylon the Great consisting of political power and commercialism and materialism, that were doomed to ruin (Rev. 17:5; 18: 10, 16-17, 19). This view of the world is crucial in our Christian life. Jesus said in Luke 11:34, “Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness.” Here Jesus talks us about the importance of one’s view. Especially our view of the world is directly related to our way of the living.

Then we understand better how significant this command is: “Do not love the world or anything in the world” is a great negative exhortation. This negative is vitally important; it is quite as important as the positive. We can say that there are no more solemn words addressed to Christian people anywhere in the Scriptures than these. According to Revelation 18:4-5, there was a voice from heaven, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.”

In the phrase, “Do not love the world,” the word “love” is from the Greek “agapaō.” So, loving the world is having the world in the place of God. It is a very serious command. It is similar to a warning against idol worship. It is interesting that 1 John ends with these words, “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.” Here John continued after saying, “Do not love the world or anything in the world,” “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” What a serious and strong statement! The Christian cannot have both the love of the Father and the love of the world. The two loves cannot coexist in the heart of a true believer. Our love for God is to be exclusive. James expressed it this way in James 4:4 says, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that the friendship with the world is hated toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” May we have a correct biblical view of the world and keep this solemn command in our hearts, “Do not love the world.”

**Second, everything in the world (16).** Now verse 16 says, “For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boasting of what he has and does –comes not from the Father but from the world.” In other translations, “For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.” In our time, “lust” mostly means “very strong sexual desire.” Yet, here the word “lust” in phrase “the lust of flesh” and “the lust of the eyes” is in Greek, *epithumia.* It means an inordinate or excessive affection or desire. It means the abuse of something which is naturally and perfectly right and legitimate in and of itself. In James 1:15, “Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin…” the desire is the same Greek word *epithumia.*

Let’s think of one by one. Firstly, “The lust of the flesh.” Let’s also understand the word “flesh.” In Galatians 5:17 it says, “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other.” And Romans 8:13 says, “For if you live according to the flesh, you will die…” And 8:6-7 says, “The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God.” Here in the phrase, “the lust of the flesh” flesh itself is not a problem, but the lust of the flesh. Apostle Paul tells us to use this world and not abuse it, saying, “those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them” or “they who use the world as not abusing it” (KJV) (1 Cor. 7:31). Those who abuse are guilty of lust.

As for the flesh, we can think of mainly two things, food and sex. We have desires to eat and to have sex. These desires are not necessarily wrong. These are God’s given desires. We need to eat food to live. Food energizes our body to work. However, if one lives to eat, that’s a problem. Paul said in Philippians 3:18-19, “For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame.” Enjoying delicious food is not necessarily bad, yet excessive eating and drinking is a big problem. When we think of our time, there are countless beverages and all kinds of delicious food and so many cafés and special restaurants with expensive meals. We can understand the meaning that their stomach is their god. It is likely that many live to eat and drink, better and better ones. Life is eating to them. People cook in various ways to enjoy more delicious food. It produces variety of seasoning and cooking method even harmful to the health causing diabetes or cancer. We know that modern diseases are mainly due to excessive eating, particularly sweet things. God’s given blessing turns out to be a curse because of the uncontrollable desire when people exclude God with no thanksgiving to him at all.

Hoses 13:5-6 say, “I cared for you in the desert, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me.” Yet, here is a beautiful prayer in Proverbs 30:8-9 say, “…give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’” Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:8, “But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”

As for sex, we are living in a culture of sexual revolution. Adultery or fornication is not considered sin anymore. In the desire to enjoy sex to the maximum degree, all the boundaries were removed and free sex is rampant in our time. It seems that sexual freedom is overriding religious freedom. Even prostitution is not considered shameful. Last week, I was surprised to hear the terms sex work and sex workers. Young and old seem to be crazy for sex. Perverted sex is welcomed without question and child abuse is beyond our thinking. The legal concept of a normal family is gone. Sex seems to be in the place of God and in that pursuit people become like animals. It is likely that to live is sex to many. Everything in the world in our time seems to stimulate this desire. God’s blessing of sex turns out to be a tragedy. This happened when people left God out of their lives and did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God (Ro. 1:28). Throughout history, sexual immorality led each individual and each nation to a terrible tragic end.

Then how shall we live? We remember Joseph in Genesis. When he became a successful handsome young man, temptation came through the wife of his boss. One day, she seduced Joseph to bed with him. Joseph refused it in the fear of God and in the honour of his boss. Then, day by day, she tempted him, speaking to him kindly, but Joseph refused to go to bed with her or even be with her (Ge. 39:10). Where we are and with whom we are is critical in such a case. Then, another day, Joseph went to the house of his boss for his duty, and she was alone there with no one else. She grabbed Joseph’s cloak and said, “Come to be with me!” But Joseph left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house (Ge. 39:11-12). When Joseph kept his purity in this way, he was falsely accused, but God was carrying out his purpose for Joseph according to his time schedule, establishing his family at the right time. A Psalmist said in Psalm 119:9-11, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word…I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Galatians 5:16 says, “…live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” And Galatians 5:24 says, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Next, let’s think about the lust of the eyes. How much we should be thankful for our eyes. With our eyes we can see the beauty of the nature and the faces of beloved ones. With our eyes we can read many good books, especially the Bible, which is able to make us wise for salvation. However, our eyes can be abused, which is the lust of the eyes. In our time, there are too many things to enjoy with our eyes. It seems that pornography is sweeping the world regardless of the ages. One’s appearance or outward beauty is considered more important than inner beauty. Dressing and hairstyles appeal to the eyes of people. Internet shopping satisfies the eyes of the searchers. There are various kinds of shows and performances. Since television and film came out, the lust of the eyes is all the more entertained. People enjoy Netflix because they can watch TV shows and movies without hinderance of commercials, and there are so many sports games to watch all year round. Smart phones or iPhones have caught the lust of the eye to the point of addiction. The lust of the eyes is overwhelming in our culture.

Job 31:1 says, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.” What a beautiful struggle before God! Jesus said in Matthew 5:28, “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” And then Jesus continued, “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.” This is called spiritual mortification. It means “don’t look at” as if you gouged it out and threw it away. Jesus wants us to have such an attitude toward the lust of the eyes.

Lastly, let’s think about the pride of life. This is huge. Human pride is everywhere, every area of life. It seems that many cannot live without pride or boasting. They seem to have no meaning of their existence without it. When there is nothing to be proud of, then there is empty pride. In our society, kids are raised as if the self is the centre of the universe. Here, pride is self-glorification including selfish ambition. People are proud of their wealth, intellect, knowledge, degrees, careers, social position, schools, skills, family backgrounds, etc. Those who do not have such things envy those who have, falling into inferiority complex. People complement and praise each other or despise others. In this world, glorifying God is unthinkable. Romans 1:21 says, “For although they knew God, they neither glorify him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Pride is the worst sin. Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” In human pride of science and various kinds of inventions and technological development, the world tries to get rid of God completely in the minds of people through all kinds of methods. Human pride seems to reach heaven like the Babel tower.

One of the important teachings of the Bible is humility, to be humble before God, the opposite of the pride of life. 1 Peter 5:5-6 says, “…All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” Proverbs 18:12 says, “Before his downfall a man’s heart is proud, but humility comes before honour.” Jesus said in Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” Our Lord Jesus was born in a manger and became a man, taking the very nature of a servant. He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross. Then God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name. (Phil. 2:8-9) Our Lord Jesus wants us to follow him in humbleness to the glory.

When think of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, we are reminded of Genesis 3:6, “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for good and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.” This was the devil’s temptation. The world tempts in the same way with the lust of flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. John summarized the contents of the world as these three things: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life. What an insightful summary of the world! John clearly wrote that these three come not from the Father but from the world. We are reminded of Apostle Paul’s wonderful attitude toward the world. He said in Galatians 6:14, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” May we learn such an attitude toward the world.

**Third, what is passing away and what is forever (17).** Verse 17 says, “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” What a straightforward description! Many live in this world as if the world goes forever. It is a mere delusion. Apostle Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 7:31, “…this world in its present form is passing away.” Each one gets old with his or her desires each day. This is a daily reality. No one can stop the time. Each and everyone is passing and the world and its desires pass away. Apostle Peter wrote it this way in 1 Peter 2:24, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the followers fall.” This is a quotation from Isaiah 40:6-8. This is also the very cry of the prophet Isaiah. In fact, this world is heading toward a total destruction as we studied in Revelation. In light of the words, “the world and its desires pass away” and “this world in its present form is passing away” we should know that the world is not getting better but worse and worse until Jesus returns to this world. Again, this view of the world is critical for our living, especially at a time like this.

But the man who does will of God lives forever. What an assertion! Each man lives in this world in a limited time. The life during the limited time will bring eternal division. The man who does the will of God in the limited span of life in this world lives forever. What a contrast to this passing world! We can say that those who love God obey God and do the will of God. Yet, who can truly do the will of God? Apostle Paul tells us to have a self-test. He said in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Jesus said in Mark 3:35, “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” Those who do the will of God are Jesus’ eternal family members. And we remember the Lord’s prayer, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10). May we serve his kingdom work in personal obedience to the will of God in this world.

Thank God for his clear words, “Do not love the world.” May we really not love the world, but keep the exclusive love for God, because of his love. May we truly do the will of God in this rapidly changing world toward the end, and live forever.