

1/05/14

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Studies in the desires of the world

Okay, last time, we looked at the subject of abiding in Christ's love. Remember, we were studying 1 John, in John Chapter 15, and what that means and how to do it. Remember, Jesus said in John 15:10 that if we keep his commandments, we'll abide in his love. That was the key idea in verse 10. If we keep his commandments, we'll abide in his love. You see, the Lord wants us to live out our love for him, to show it, to practice it, by constantly choosing to live by his commandments, by what he tells us is the way to live, to live by his commandments, choosing to do what he says because we love him. You know, when there's a family that so loves one another, that they do as much as they can always to seek to please the others in the family when you have a family like that, that's going to be a happy family, and that will be a loving family. That's really what Jesus is teaching here for us, his spiritual family.

Love Not the World

I want you to go to 1 John Chapter 2 and verse 15, which is a very basic teaching in 1 John 2, verse 15. Here, we have a contrast with what Jesus was telling us in John Chapter 15 about abiding in his love. Here's a contrast. 1 John 2, verse 15. "Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." That's a contrast with loving the Lord and keeping his commandments. The contrast is loving the world, he says. And if you do that, the love of the Father is not in you.

So, in verse 16, he tells us collectively what he means by the world. Okay, in verse 16. He says, "Love not the world," in 15, but what is that? He says this in 16, "For all that is in the world," see, that's telling you now what the world is, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world." So, collectively, he says, look at the world this way. It includes the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Now, if you know what those are, you'll understand what he's warning us against, as far as the world is concerned.

Lust of the Flesh

Lust, let's take that up first. Lust is used to speak of strong desire or desires. Strong desire or desires. And flesh, you know, the lust of the flesh. Flesh is used to speak of the natural man. Just as we are born, the natural man is the man seeking to fulfill his God-designed needs or his God-designed functions, but according to his self-centered values. That's what the flesh is. It's just the

natural man trying to fulfill his God-designed needs or functions but to do it under his own control and according to his own self-centered values.

When you have that, and I spoke of the good of others in the family, well, when you have this, the good of others is forgotten when you're operating by self-centered values. In fact, all moral values that would block self-interest, anything that would get in the way of having your own way, all of those values are set aside. Self is exalted as supreme. And self-will is in control. It all comes down to the self having its own way.

Now, you have to look at it this way, according to the scriptures. God has designed us as male and female. That's his design. He wants us to see in the one that we might choose as a life companion; he wants us to see all that Adam saw in Eve. Whether you're married or not, you can still go to the scriptures and see what these truths are for yourself. All that Adam saw in Eve. What did he see? Well, she was made to fulfill Adam's God-designed needs. That's the way she was made. Made to fulfill Adam's God-designed needs. She was harmonious with him as far as his body was concerned. She wasn't a carbon copy, but she was harmonious with him. She agreed with him. She was a companion in the sense of the other side of what he was. He needed her to be complete, is one way of thinking of it. In that sense, she agreed with him. She harmonized with what he was. But she was that part that he needed. He needed to draw that part to himself to be complete. He needed to cherish that part and bring her close. He needed to protect and keep her safe. And he needed to please her to show his love to her. All those things were necessary for God's design to be realized.

But when the lust of the flesh is in control, a person is sought out, or you could say one is sought out, to fulfill sexual appetites, for instance, without concern for that one being in agreement of heart with living to please God. I mean, that doesn't even enter the issue when one is driven by sexual standards alone. The question isn't asked: does this one want to agree with me in my heart to please God? No. In fact, the person that's seeking somebody at that level is really living to please themselves. Their living to please themselves is supreme. It's in control. That's all that counts.

So, when the God-designed need for food and, drink, and clothing are God-designed needs as well for the body, when that's fulfilled under self-values self-control, people can turn to things like thievery, bullying, disregard for others, and even violence to make sure that they get what they want in the area of food and drink and clothing because other people don't count first.

Christ Tempted in the Flesh

I want you to turn with me to Matthew chapter 6, where the Lord is teaching. We sometimes call this the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 6, I'd like to read there for you from, let's go to verse 31. Jesus says this, "Therefore

do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" Now remember, these are all God-designed needs for the body. "For after all these things the Gentiles seek," might as well put the word "heathen" there. It means those that don't worship God. "For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." Do you know why he knows you need all those things? Because he made you to need them. He designed you to need them. He knows you need them. "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and here's a promise, "and all these things shall be added to you." What a promise. Don't put self first, put God first. Don't seek self-desires first; seek what pleases him first. Seek him; he calls it his righteousness. In other words, live harmoniously with his very nature. In other words, go along with his word, with his will. Live in a way to please him.

And his answer to you is this, "You do that. You will not have to worry about what you eat, what you drink, or what you wear. I'll take care of that for you. Don't worry," he says. "All these things will be added to you." But people like to worry. Really, the reason they like to worry is they like to be in control. So here you see God's design and people's determination to try to meet those needs that God has designed in us, to meet them under their own control.

When Satan tempted Christ, I want to take you back to Matthew 4. Can you go back to Matthew 4 with me? He first tempted Christ in verse 4--I'm sorry, verse 3, I want to read that. He first tempted Christ with the lust of the flesh. Here it says, "Now when the tempter came to him, he said, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones become bread.'" Now, why is that the lust of the flesh? Because that deals with one of the needs that God has designed in us. He has designed us as sexual creatures, but that's not sex. But he's also designed us as creatures that live from day to day and need food. We need what we eat and what we drink. He also has designed us as frail creatures. We need clothing. And here Satan comes to him with a very legitimate need--food. Very legitimate need.

It doesn't have the overtones of sexual fulfillment, maybe, but Satan is subtle. He seeks us out on issues that maybe we're not as defensive about. He comes to Christ on the issue of food, and he tells him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones become bread." It's not a question of whether he believed whether he was the Son of God or not. Certainly, he knew that. Remember, Christ is the creator. Christ created Satan. He was in heaven with him as the Son of God. He's really saying, "All right, you're the Son of God. Prove it." If you're in control as a Son of God, now you're in a body, and you need food, go ahead, use your powers to feed yourself. Your powers even of creation, turning stones into bread, is a creative power. But you see, in submitting to be a human being, Jesus agreed to be like you and, like me, made according to the design of God. One of the features of being a person, according to the design of God, is the need to eat. In submitting to be a person,

he was also submitting to do the will of God the Father. Never to do what pleased him, Christ, without surrender to the Father.

As the Son of God, could he have created bread from stones? We know he could because he took five loaves and broke bread for 5,000. But you know, he didn't do that to meet his own hunger. He did that to meet the hunger of the multitude. Nothing in the scripture tells you that Jesus ever did anything for himself, for his pleasure, for his convenience, for his ease. Even when they tortured him, he didn't lessen it. He accepted it all, as he accepted even his hunger. Satan wanted him to usurp the will of God in this area of the flesh, of the needs of God's design in the body. His answer is, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

Now, let me tell you something that isn't impractical. Some said, "That's impractical." It isn't. He's trying to tell you that God's commands, God's instructions, God's designs are first. God's will is first. When we yield to God, when we follow him according to his word, then he promises that our needs will be met. If we don't first follow him, if he isn't first, if we put ourselves first, we lose the promise. We no longer have the promise of his care. Now, we can do that, but we pay a price. Here's the promise. "Seek his righteousness, seek his kingdom, seek him, and all these things will be added to you." So, Satan failed on that temptation with our Lord.

Tempted "Lust of the Eyes"

And Satan tempted Christ a second time. Go down to verse 8. In verse 8, "Again the devil took them up on an exceeding high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, 'All these things I will give to you if you will fall down and worship me.'" Put me first in your heart. Put my will first in your heart. Worship me, all the kingdoms of the world." So, in other words, all the stuff of the world, houses and lands and cars and TV sets and diamonds and gold and money, all the stuff of the world, put me first, and I'll give you this.

Well, would you turn to Revelation chapter 18, because in the last days of the Great Tribulation, as we have it in Revelation 18, there is a system under Satan's control, a world system called Babylon, Great City, it's said, which really is Satan's empire. And Babylon is destroyed. Let me read chapter 18 of Revelation, verse 1.

"After these things, I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined or illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice saying, 'Babylon the Great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. The kings of the earth have committed fornication with

her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.'"

This matter of business transaction, this matter of involvement of life and heart, this intercourse of business is called, you see, fornication. It's a sexual term, and the idea is not sex here, but it's the filthiness of having your life intertwined with this one and dependent upon this one. And all the nations have done this. Verse 4, "And I heard another voice from heaven saying," and I think this is the counsel to the people of God, this fourth verse, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."

We have no business using the world and being involved in the world the way the unbelievers are. There's no blessing there, he says. It's only to our hurt. "For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works. In the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. In the measure that she glorified herself," there is the self-glorification, putting self first, "and lived luxuriously," now that's by man's standards of luxury. "In the same measure, give her torment and sorrow, for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen and am no widow and will not see sorrow.'" That's a lie. It's a lie. "Therefore, her plagues will come in one day."

You see, the world system can go on this way, and it will come to its peak in the Tribulation. And people will say, "Well, you know, God has never brought judgment upon the world because of all that. What's wrong with following in that system? Nothing ever happens to our hurt." And God would answer this way, "No, but there is a day coming when it will be judged, and it will be a quick judgment. No, there isn't a constant judgment upon the world for their bad choices and their giving of their hearts to the stuff of the world. Do you want to live by that stuff? You pay a price.

You may not see that price paid every day. In a measure, it's there, but there is a day when it will be paid in full.

"Death and mourning and famine, and she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her. The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city, for in one hour your judgment has come.' And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise any more."

Merchandise, now here's the stuff of the world.

"Merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron and marble, and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. The

fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all." That's God's statement of what he brings against the world in his judgments. The world's stuff that man has sold their souls for. You know, there's nothing in any of those things that is evil in itself. Scripture does not say that money is the root of all evil. It says, "The love of money is the root of all evil." Gold is not evil; diamonds are not evil; houses are not evil, and riches are not evil. It's the love of those things that takes over the human heart that's evil. Can we have those things and still be godly? Of course, we can if we love God above those things. If we love God first, above everything. It's when we love the stuff first when we set our heart on the stuff. That's why, in Satan's temptation, he took Christ up and showed him all those things. And then he said, "All these things I'll give you if you will fall down and worship me."

The Lord Jesus' answer is wonderful. He said, "Away with you, Satan. For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" It takes the Lord Jesus sometimes to put it in simple terms for us. When we put stuff, anything in fact, in first place over our love for the Lord, really that's worship. To say we love it is to say we worship it. Love is the key to worship. To give yourself to anything is to worship it. If we love money, we worship it. We put it in first place in our value system.

God wants to be in that first place. He says you should "love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and all your strength." Nothing should take the place of your love for your Lord. Certainly not the stuff of this world.

And when we do, we fall under the "lust of the eyes" — the lust of the eyes. You look out across the earth, and you see all the things on the earth. If you make those things to be first in your heart, you're falling under the lust of the eyes. Houses and lands are wonderful, but if they're first, they become lust of the eyes. You can receive them, but you can receive them with thanksgiving to God and use them for his glory. You can love him first; they won't be a stumbling block. The Lord's answer is complete. God is to be first. He's the one we're to worship. Him only you're supposed to serve.

Tested in "The Pride of Life"

Thirdly, Satan comes in chapter 4 of Matthew with verse 5. Now I've taken number 2 and number 3 and I've switched them. I've done it for your sake. I've done it so it would go along with 1 John 2. Let's see what this temptation was in verse 5. "Then the devil took him into the holy city, set him on the pinnacle of the temple." Now, the pinnacle of the temple is thought to be the highest of the corners. The highest of the corners! Be where the cornerstone was. And from that position, one could look out across the city of David below, the Kidron Valley, and the mountains. And it was a very, very high place. It could have been

a hundred feet up and more from all our measures of today. And while we don't think of 10 stories being a tremendously high place, when you think of jumping off from the 10th story, suddenly it becomes a very high place. The human body is not made to endure a fall from 10 stories up, is it? You're very fortunate if you could live through a three-story fall. Some have. Four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. What are your chances?

It makes me think of the terrible day when the Twin Towers were struck in New York. And as the towers burned, people were starting to realize that their lives were gone. And they could feel the heat of the flames coming up toward where they were. And they made a decision that instead of staying where they were and enduring the torture of burning to death, they would just jump off and end it all. And that day, there were bodies falling from the heights of those towers, one after the other. The firemen below could hardly believe their eyes. They watched person after person after person after person jump to their death 80, 90, 100 stories to their death.

And so Satan says, "If you're the son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He shall give his angels charge over you. In their hands, they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" In other words, the angels are responsible for taking care of you. And they will keep you from being injured. They'll bear you up. You won't dash your foot against a stone. But what he's telling Christ to do is to initiate the danger by jumping off.

And so the Lord's answer is this, "It is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Now, many, many Christians have just stumbled at that idea of tempting the Lord. What is it to tempt God? What is it? Well, it comes to this. If you think exactly what Satan is trying to get Jesus to do, it's taking control, telling God to obey your will, exalt your will, exalt it over the will of God, and make it first. You call the shots. Use God's word to justify your self-willed action. People do it all the time. That's what tempting God is. Putting your will over the will of God. Deciding that instead of submitting to God, you're going to have it your way. You're determined to do it your way.

I've heard Christians say something like this, "Well, I'm sick and tired of this, whatever it is. I'm going to finally, I'm going to do this. I'm not going to take it anymore." So they go off on their own. They put their will above the will of God. And then, I don't know, they seem to want to expect God's blessing to follow, but it won't. It can't.

God gives us a place in Isaiah chapter 14 that tells us exactly how Satan did this. I'll read it with you: Isaiah 14, verse 13. Now, this is told in the scriptures. This is the prophet Isaiah saying precisely what Satan was saying in his heart back there when he was in heaven.

"For you have said in your heart, 'I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will also sit on the Mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High.'"

Five "I" wills. And in each of them, what he's doing is saying he's going to put his will above the will of God. He's going to put himself above God. He's going to be exalted, not God. He will be first, not God.

And what God tells you is you ought to love him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Love him. Don't love putting your will above, especially God's will. Love him by putting your will under his will. Never first. Put his will first. Put his word first. Put him first. That's what God asks. There's a little phrase, one of the most beautiful little phrases in the Psalms. I've given it to you before, but it's one of my favorites. Psalm 18, verse 1. Just this simple little statement. "I will love you, O Lord, my strength." I will love you. That's my choice. I will love you. Not me. Not the world. Not my will over your will. I've determined I will love you. I'll lift my heart up to worship you. Not the lust of the flesh. Not the lust of the eyes. Not the pride of life. The pride of life is tempting the Lord your God. The pride of life is exalting yourself above even God's will, even God Himself. That's what the world is. Love not the world, he says. Love me constantly by choosing to do my word, my commandments, and my will. Love me. Love me. That's what God says.

Father, thank you for wanting us to love you. To live each day choosing to do your will. Choosing to obey. Choosing to walk with you. Thank you for the example, Lord Jesus, of your rebuke of Satan. Directing us all ways back to love you. To love your word, to love your kingdom, to love your glory, to love your will, to love you. And leave the rest to you. In your care, your provision, your protection. That all your promises could give us what you promised, Lord. Joy. And make us joyful because you're first in our life. We praise you in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.