



# **Competing Loves**

**1 John 2:15-17**

## INTRODUCTION

We live in a competitive world. Things are always competing for our attention, our energy, and our resources. Every time we say yes to one thing, we say no to something else. As much as we would like to say yes to multiple influences in our lives, the reality is that we cannot.

When I entered college, I was confronted with a number of choices. I had to decide what major I would pursue. I also had to decide on which extra-curricular activities I would be involved in. During orientation, I auditioned for both the Concert Choir and the Men's Glee Club. Both organizations offered me a position. I would have loved to sing with both, but I had to choose. Later I had to choose between singing with the Glee Club and running with the cross-country team. By saying yes to one group, I automatically said no to the others.

That principle is at the heart of what John is teaching us. To say yes to God is to say no to the world, and vice versa. To understand clearly what John is saying, we need to understand what he means by the world. He is not referring to the physical world as such. Neither is he referring to the people in the world. He is referring to the world in rebellion against God; the pagan society that was organized around false values and false gods.

John's understanding of this competitive environment was shaped by the Jewish understanding of history. The Jews divided history into this present age and the age to come. This present age was evil and opposed to God. The age to come was good and submitted to God's rule. It was the coming Messiah who would usher in the age to come.

The Church embraced this understanding, with a twist. Jesus indeed ushered in the age to come, but this present age did not disappear. This present age and the age to come now coexisted

in the physical world. They were in competition with one another. Those who continued to live under the dominion of sin were living in this present age. Those who had put their faith in Christ had entered into the age to come. Therefore, the Church saw a sharp distinction between living as a part of the world and living as distinct from the world. They looked forward to the return of Christ, when the age to come would be realized in its fullness. Until that time, they lived with these competing influences in their lives.

The dynamic struggle that the early Church was in is still in force today. As followers of Christ, we have been called to live in the world, but not to be incorporated as a part of the world. We are to live distinct lives that show that we belong to the age to come and not to this present age. All of us struggle with the competing influences in our lives. Our desire is to follow Christ fully, yet often our reality is something different. We can become enticed by the things this material world has to offer, and get off track spiritually. Every day we have to make the effort to intentionally say yes to Jesus and no to the world.

1 Peter 2:9

***But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.***

## **Study 1: 1 John 2:15**

John clearly sets up the choice that everyone has to make.

1. Why is it wrong for us to love the world?
2. What does it mean to love the world?
3. What does it mean to love the things of this world? Why is that dangerous?
4. What does it mean to love the Father?
5. Why are love of the world and love for the Father mutually exclusive?

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. What are the different ways that we use the word love?
2. How can we reconcile John's command to not love the world with his statement about God's love for the world in John 3:16?
3. In what ways are we tempted to give our allegiance to the world instead of to Christ?
4. How can a passion for material things hinder our spiritual growth?
5. In what ways can you show your love for the Father through the way you interact with the material things of this world?
6. What does Jesus teach us about trying to straddle the fence between God and the world in Matthew 6:24?

## **Study 2: 1 John 2:16**

John defines the components that make up the influence of the world on our lives.

1. Why do you think John begins with an all-inclusive statement about the world?
2. How would you define the cravings of sinful man?
3. What is the lust of the eyes?
4. What does “the boasting of what he has and does” mean?
5. What is the source of these “lusts” as the King James puts them?
6. Why are these incompatible with love for the Father?
7. Why is the word “lust” both a good description of the influence of the world, but also misleading?

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. James, in James 4:4-10, addresses the same competition as John does.
  - a. How does James set up the choice we have to make?
  
  - b. What warning does James give to us?
  
  - c. What instruction does James give to us?
  
2. When John refers to the world, he is speaking of the evil influence of Satan over both the physical and spiritual realms. How has Satan tainted the world in which we live?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. The lust of the flesh is far more than sexual sin. What are some other ways that our sinful cravings are manifest?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. The lust of the eyes is covetousness. In what ways is this destructive to us and others?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. In what ways is egotistical boasting detrimental to us and others?

## **Study 3: 1 John 2:17**

John focuses on the outcome of this dynamic competition.

1. What is the eventual destiny of the world and its desires?
2. How do we see this being worked out today?
3. What is the promise given to those who seek after God?
4. How can seeking the will of God help us avoid the temptations of the world?

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. How have your passions and desires changed over the years?
2. Where have you tangibly seen the transient nature of this world?
3. In what way is the reality that this world will pass away a positive thing?
4. What is involved in doing the will of God?
5. In what way is Galatians 6:9 an encouragement to us to choose to serve God instead of the world?
6. How can 1 Peter 1:3-5 motivate us to choose God over the world?

## Study 4: Matthew 6:19-23

Jesus set up the same competition as John. He contrasts striving after the things of this world to striving after the things of God.

1. The first choice is to store up treasures on earth.
  - a. What does the word treasure mean to you?
  
  - b. What does it mean to store up treasures for yourself?
  
  - c. What reason does Jesus give for this being a bad idea?
  
2. The second choice is to store up treasures in heaven.
  - a. Why is this a better choice?
  
  - b. In what ways can a person store up treasures in heaven?
  
3. In verse 21, Jesus gets to the very heart of the matter.
  - a. What truth does Jesus state?
  
  - b. What is the importance of this truth?
  
4. What is Jesus' point when He refers to the eye as the lamp of the body?

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. The Bible does not prohibit the possession of material things. In fact, God often blessed His people materially.

a. What does this passage say to us about our attitude toward our material things?

b. How can our material things become a trap for us?

c. What is Jesus' point about moth and rust destroying things?

d. What is Jesus' point about thieves stealing our things?

2. Jesus instructs us to establish a heavenly investment portfolio.

a. What are some ways that you can make deposits in your spiritual account?

b. What keeps you from making those deposits?

3. How much influence does your worldly pursuits have in your life right now?

4. What does it mean for you to have a good eye, instead of a bad eye? How does this change the way you view the world?