

How to Beat the System | Reading: 1 John 2:15-17

These verses should not be read as an utter rejection of the world. John is telling us we are not to love the system of this world. This is why he provides examples for what he is specifically talking about – the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes & the pride of life. These things summarise how the sinful system of this present world works. The Bible uses the word world in three ways: 1. In regards to creation. 2. In regards to people. 3. In regards to the sinful worldly system of which Satan is prince. Satan did not create the earth we inhabit (he does not have that kind of power!) but he is behind the evil system presently at work in this world. Satan is not a creator, he is a corruptor. In this sense John writes in 5:19 that **“the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”**

With this in mind it is obvious that this worlds system is not compatible with the love of the Father & it is this worlds system which is passing away according to John. It is not creation or people that are passing away in John’s mind here; it is the system & desires of this world. So when we sing *“the cross before me, the world behind me, no turning back”* we are not walking away from the world God made for our enjoyment & his glory, the world he has promised to one day renew & reunite with heaven. In other words we have not turned our back on the beauty of Clew Bay, or the creativity of art, or the fun of sport, or the enjoyment of food & drink etc. Neither are we turning our back on people Christ has died for as much as us, as verse 2 of this chapter affirms! – Jesus has called us to **“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole of creation”** (Mark 16:15). John has already declared in his Gospel; **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”** – No, we are turning our back on the evil system presently at work in this world corrupting all God has made & given. The system which flows in the opposite direction to the gospel we have been entrusted with.

In light of this we could say that John tells us 1. Do Not Love the System (15). 2. How the System Works (16). 3. The System is Doomed (17). These are my three points from these verses today.

1. *DO NOT LOVE THE SYSTEM (v15):* **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”**

When John tells us not to love the world he is telling us we are not to have the same values as the system of this world. Like Satan with Christ in the wilderness the worldly system of which he is prince makes its powerful appeal to our flesh, eyes & pride. The world offers us things that will incite our flesh, entice our senses & appeal to our ego. What we need to deeply understand is that the whole system of this world is characterised by the value system of Satan. John is telling us not to love or idolise what this world does because the thinking, values & behaviour of this world are so contrary to the will of God that they actually reflect his greatest enemy. This is why he says so emphatically; **“Do not love the world or the things in**

the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” How can someone claim to possess the love of the Father & value what is contrary to his will. If this verse is right, which it is, then it means that to value what this world values is to not love the Father. **Listen to Jesus words in John 8:42-47.**

Another side to this is this: To not love the Father is to not love what & who we need most & who we can trust most. To love the world or the things in the world is to not love the one who wants what is best for us. John wants us to choose the love of our true Father over the love of the father of lies. Our true Father is not trying to rob us of anything. Everything he does & says – whether it be by commandment or promise, warning or encouragement – comes from a heart that wants what is best for his children. No one can desire better for us than God the Father & no one can desire worse for us than the father of lies. If we only grasped this one thing our faith in God will take off!

The hardest of God’s commandments is for our eternal joy while the most appealing of Satan’s temptations is for our eternal ruin. From the very beginning, starting with Adam & Eve, Satan has been convincing people it is the other way around – this is the mission of the father of lies & the system of this world reflects this. It was through this deception that the evil system of this world was established. However Christ has come to open our eyes to the goodness of the Father so that we fall head-over-heels in love with the only One who truly loves us in all the ways we need to be loved. True believers trust the true Father; their ears are open to the words of his Son. Unbelievers believe the father of lies & cannot bear to hear the truth that contradicts their thinking, values & behaviour.

With all this in mind Jesus prays to the Father regarding his disciples in John 17:14-20; **“I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they may also be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but for all who will believe in me through their word.”**

These verses describe the Christian’s relationship with the world. We are in the world but not of it. Sent into the world, yet sent as those sanctified in truth. The Christian is not to be shaped by the world they are sent into, but by the word they are sent with! We cannot do the will of God & live by the value system of this world anymore than we can simultaneously walk in two opposite directions.

- 2. HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS (v16): “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”**

The system of this world is based on sensuality, materialism & pride – on feelings, things & ego! Live in the moment, do what feels good, look after number one, make a name for yourself. This is the talk of the system of the world. The system knows how to appeal to us, it knows our weakness, it knows its market & therefore appeals to us very powerfully! This verse identifies the weapons the world uses to seduce men & women to buy its goods. Amazingly each of these weapons reside in us & go right back to the Garden of Eden! Only by following God’s truth in the power of the Spirit can we overcome the feelings & desires which pull us in the opposite direction.

I. The Desires of the Flesh

When John mentions the desires of the flesh he is talking about strong desire (lust, craving, passion) towards what is contrary to God’s will. Peter writes in 2:11 of his first letter; **“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”** This is a real battle for the Christian & this is why being a Christian is fundamentally not about following our feelings. John has been telling us about the importance of keeping Christ’s commandments for a reason. His commandments are more reliable than our desires. His commandments lead to life, the desires of the flesh lead to hell.

We hear people saying at times I feel the Lord wants me to do this or that. This is a dangerous basis for Christian living because what we feel is not as trustworthy as what the Lord commands because often the little super-spiritual voice in our head is not the Holy Spirit, it is us. Us, telling ourselves what we want to hear! That is no way to live the Christian life. I have seen people try to live the Christian life that way & they go around in circles for years, never getting anywhere their because their faith is based on feelings more than truth. The person who truly hears God’s voice walks in, is guided by, is committed to obeying his word in spite of what their feelings are telling them...

While I was reflecting on this I happened to read Psalm 37 & of course in verse 4 it says; **“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”** There is that word **“desires”** again. This is one of those verses which gets isolated from its context & misused. I thought; imagine if you exchanged the word **“heart”** for **“flesh”**... Do you think that delighting yourself in the Lord would ever lead to him giving you the desires of your flesh? That is how it can be made to sound when it is misquoted – *“God will give you what you want...”* No, no, no; the truth of this verse is that God will change what you want! Delight yourself in the LORD... truly doing so will transform your desires! Our problem is we are prone to delight ourselves in other things. But as verse 23 says; **“The steps of a man are ordered by the LORD, when he delights in his way”** for as verse 31 says; **“The law of his God is in his heart.”** Are you delighting in his way? Is his law in your heart? Or is the world in your heart. What do you think delighting in his way looks like? For the Authentic Christian it looks like the cross! Also, delighting yourself in the Lord is really another way

of saying Love God & when you love God you get what you want because you want him. Delighting ourselves in the Lord is the key to overcoming the flesh & unlike the world the Father can fulfil his promises.

II. The Desires of the Eyes

Desires of the flesh point to those strong feelings within, the desires of the eyes point to all the things in the world which can arouse those feelings... It is what David saw that led him to sin. There is a lot to see in this world which can lead us to sin. This is why the Christian is called to set his mind on the things above, where Christ is seated. Fixing our eyes on him is what will keep our eyes off all that could lead us astray. The desires of the eyes also points to materialism – things, stuff. How much debt will there be this Christmas because of the desires of the eyes? There is much more freedom in the story of the baby in the manger than in listening to a world that is always telling you need more stuff. At Christmas time I see such a clash of kingdoms... How less stressed would we be & more satisfied & rich would we be if we left all the Christmas hype & spin, extravagance & expense & simply focused on him.

III. The Pride of Life

Pride of life points to the boasting of what one has & does. It leads to boasting or coveting depending on how you view yourself compared to others. And there is the problem it's all about self – *"look who what I have or don't have, look at who I am or am not."* Pride of life causes us to glory in ourselves rather than God. In doing so it takes away every reason to be grateful & thankful. Stuff or career or position becomes the idol of the heart. Pride, power, possessions, prestige & position are what life is all about.

Daniel Akin writes; *"Jesus sets for us a beautiful counter example. Concerning pride in birth & rank, he was a carpenter's son (Matt 13:55), a poor family's child (Luke 2:24; see Lev 12:8). Concerning pride in possessions, he said, "The Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matt 8:20). Concerning pride in pedigree, it was said of him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Concerning pride in people, it was said of him, "[He is] a friend of tax collectors & sinners (Matt 11:19). Concerning pride in intellect, he said, "As the Father taught me, I say these things" (John 8:28). Concerning pride in self-will, he said, "If you are willing, take this cup away from me—nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done (Luke 22:42)."*

This is the King of the kingdom we now belong to. A kingdom not of this world & our desire, like our King, is to do the will of God. This is the greater desire that will save us from the desires of the flesh & eyes & pride of life. These verses are all about doing the will of God & John makes it clear here that we cannot do the will of God & by living by the value system of this world. We need to let go of the value system that is

passing away & cling to the true light which John says is already shining (v8)... v17 **“And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”**

THE SYSTEM IS DOOMED (v17):

What advantage is there in gaining everything a world that is passing away has to offer when you can receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Eugene Peterson writes that; *“The church is a colony of heaven in a country of death.”* John tells us the true light is already shining in a world that is passing away. In the world to come there will be no sensuality, materialism & boasting – the world is passing away along with its desires – so why waste our lives on them now? Let’s make it our goal to do the will of the God who abides forever not to give into desires that only lead to temporary pleasure. Psalm 16:11 says; **“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”**

The key to beating the system – the system of this world – is loving the Father, delighting ourselves in him above all else! No wonder Jesus said the first & greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind & strength & John tells us later we love only because he first loved us.