



MERCY HILL

Do Not Love the World

Session 4

1 John 2:12-17

Main Point

In Christ our sins have been forgiven, empowering us to love the Father wholeheartedly.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is something you looked forward to every year as a child? Why?

What about now? What is something you are looking forward to right now?

How does looking forward to something in the future change your attitude and behavior in the present?

The Christian lives between the two appearances of Jesus Christ. With the first appearance, Jesus provided a way for us to be reconciled to the Father. In salvation, our sins are forgiven once and for all. Then with Jesus' second coming, which we look forward to, He will bring an end to Satan, and the temptations and struggles we face in this world will be no more. John's reminder to his readers in today's text is that only through knowing what happened in the past and looking forward to the future can we live rightly in the present.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read 1 John 2:12-14.

In your spiritual life, which of the three stages John addresses in verses 12-14 can you most relate to: children, young men, or fathers? Why did you pick that stage?

How is John affirming these Christians in their faith?

Which of the reminders in these verses do you most need to hear today?

John assured Christians of their standing before God: God has forgiven their sins; they know Him; and they have overcome the evil one. Next he warned his readers against an attitude that would lead to spiritual ruin—love of the world and its things.

Have a volunteer read 1 John 2:15-17.

What does John mean by “the world” in these verses? How does his use of the word differ from its use in John 3:16?

What does it mean to love the world?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. What insight does this passage give you into the differences between loving the world and loving the Father? How is it possible for you to not love the world?

In 1 John 2, the term world refers to unbelieving society, seen as a rebel order hostile to God. Viewed as an evil system, organized under Satan’s control, the world should not be loved, because it tempts believers away from God and into sin. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33), and faith in Him assures us of victory over the hostility and power of the world controlled by Satan.

John lists three typical features of the sinful world. What are they, and why are they such affronts to God?

What are some practical ways we can combat each of these temptations?

The apostle listed three typical features of the sinful world. The desires of the flesh refers to the unlawful desires centered in one’s human nature corrupted by sin. Flesh refers to the self-oriented outlook of a person. Such an outlook leads one to pursue selfish ends in rebellion against God. The desires of the eyes can refer particularly to sexual lust but also to everything that lures the eyes. The basic thought focuses on greed or unlawful craving aroused by what the eyes see. The phrase pride in possessions implies an arrogant self-sufficiency and a false sense of security. These attitudes are based on a false estimate of the stability and value of worldly things. This pride boasts in one’s external circumstances, including such things as wealth, rank, and dress.

What is the ultimate fate of the world and its lusts? How should this truth cause us to respond to the temptations we face day in and day out? How should it impact our relationships with people who don’t know Christ?

The world and those who follow worldly desires are temporary. Permanence belongs only to those who do the will of God. Genuine love for God and others will lead us to reject the sinful appeals of the world. Do our actions reflect the world’s or God’s values? We should resist the lure of the world and follow God’s will to love. In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul gives us additional insight into how we say no to the things of the world.

Have a volunteer read Titus 2:11-14.

How do Jesus’ first and second coming influence the worldliness of the Christian?

How have you seen God’s grace through Jesus instruct you to deny the things of the world?

Why does a person have to be confident in the second coming of Jesus in order to live rightly today?

The longer you are a Christian, the less at home you feel in the world. Because of Jesus' first appearance, Christians have been changed by God's grace. As we look forward to His second coming, we find what we need to say no to the things of the world.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Read Matthew 4:1-11. How did Satan use each of these “worldly” values to tempt Jesus to sin? What does this teach us about the ways he tempts us to sin?

Based on Jesus' response to Satan, what is the best way to fight back against these temptations?

In what area of your life does love for the world most often compete with love for God? For each area mentioned in your group, come up with a verse from Scripture that can be prayed to help fight back against that temptation.

Pray

Close in prayer, thanking God for the reality of your salvation—the forgiveness of sins and the promise that in Christ you have overcome Satan. Pray that as you are tempted by the things of the world this week you will remember your identity in Christ and claim God's power to fight back against those temptations.

Commentary

1 John 2:12-17

Verses 12-14 seem to be reassuring John's readers that they are in fact Christians. He contrasts the spiritual status of the believers with the assessment of the self-praising false teachers. Apparently, these teachers claimed that ordinary believers did not really know God because they had not received special knowledge of him through mystical means. If so, the following warning not to love the world (vv. 15-17) might also be prompted by these same false teachers who did love the world.

John addressed three sets of readers, little children, fathers, and young men. Often, when a Bible author contrasts ages (young/old), he does so as a figure of speech to denote young, old, and everyone in between. If this principle of interpretation is accepted for verses 12-14, then whatever is said of each age category is intended to be true for all believers. If so, then like children, all of them had experienced the forgiveness of sins and all of them had known their heavenly Father. Like fathers, they had all known Him who is from the beginning. That is, they had truly known and experienced fellowship with God. Like young men, all of them had engaged in spiritual warfare and had overcome the evil one, the devil, and had grown strong, perhaps because of the Word (you are strong, and the word of God abides in you).

John seems to make it clear that his readers were Christians. They were my little children (2:1) and beloved (4:1). Far from calling into question their salvation or expressing dissatisfaction with their spiritual growth, John seems to reassure them of their salvation. Having reassured them, he then warned them against false teaching and dangers from the world.

Not only are they to love God and their brothers; they are not to love the world. The world in this context refers to the attitudes and values that disregard God or are blatantly against God. It certainly does not refer to God's natural creation or even humanity (we are to love the people in the world for whom Christ died, as God does, John 3:16), but to that part of human affairs that are under the authority of the devil. We love the people of the world, but we do not love the sinful attitudes and values they may embrace. If we love the world, we are not loving God. We cannot love the world and love God at the same time. This interpretation is strengthened by James 4:4, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God."

The reason we are not to love the world is that the world's values are in opposition to God. The desires of the flesh are the sinful interests and desires that draw us away from God. The desires of the eyes refers to sinful desires that corrupt us. The pride in possessions refers to the arrogance and pride that can overtake us as we try to "get ahead of the Joneses" and when we rely on ourselves rather than God for our material possessions and worldly positions. These values are foolish for two reasons. First, they do not come from the Father. Therefore, they interfere with our fellowship with the Father. Second, we are all going to die, and what we are living for will come to nothing.