

Sermon: Moral Living in a Seductive Society

Text: **I John 2:15-17** ESV

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Introduction: Firstly, let's define what we are talking about for "moral living." *Moral* "is concerned with the principles of rules of right conduct or the distinction between right and wrong; ethical." - Dictionary.com

I am always shocked by what some people think is morally right! Our world is not a safe place to live simply because even our American cultural values are shifting, rapidly reflecting more and more the Prince of this world, the Devil himself.

Jason Hobbs, in an article online, provided three sets of American cultural values:

1. Individual Freedom and Self-Reliance

Yet freedom can be dangerous when your freedom takes mine away. And self-reliance is just the opposite of the biblical concept of being submissive to God and others. It is at odds with the idea of being in community and fellowship with others, and the Church as a Body serving *others'* best interest.

2. Equality of Opportunity and Competition

There is generally not a problem with equality of opportunity, but it is God after all that provides our giftedness. And even though viewed as different quality-wise by some, God says all are equally important to the health of the community. And with competition, in our culture, there are always going to be perceived winners AND losers.

3. The American Dream and Hard Work

There is nothing wrong with hard, honest work, if we are working for the right Boss. Yet, Work can take you away from the important responsibilities of God and family. Even the ministry is not immune to this problem. Teresa once told me, "You care more about the Church than you do your family." Ouch!

To Whom are you giving your time? Satan, the Prince of this world, will never ascend the throne, and Jesus will always be Lord of lords and King of kings. So where does it make sense to invest your time, talent, and treasure and allegiance?

You want to know where I go for direction on values and moral living? I go to God's Word that is changeless and always true. It is my guide for successful living.

The Church is in a spiritual war for the souls of the world and the generations who are coming up behind us who are more and more disinterested in God. Church has become for many a non-essential and God's Word just another fable or at best a guidebook for living the American dream.

Much of our world is trying to remove the Name of God from the marketplace. Prayer is thought of as a public threat rather than a public good. Coach Joe Kennedy had to go to the U.S. Supreme Court to secure his right to pray on a football field after a game.

I am amazed: at all the dollars being raised politically and by Planned Parenthood to make it possible to kill babies in America.

I am amazed so many of the world's citizens are proud about their sin and affront to God and where a quarter of the population doesn't have any religious beliefs.

I am amazed people continue to make high-risk decisions about gender that only God can make.

I am amazed people can write and drop the F-bomb freely without regard for anyone else's beliefs, and then are highly offended about any public conversation regarding faith or God's love for them.

I am amazed that euthanasia (good death) that Dr Kevorkian made famous in America is legal some places. Let me tell you the only good death anyone will experience is a person who is "in Christ."

It is no wonder that John tells us: [I John 2:15 ESV](#) ¹⁵ 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.

Let's look at our text again and:

I. Define Some Words

A. world - In the NT, the Greek word $\kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma$ is a heavily used word by John (105/185). Normally the world stands in opposition to the plans of God for us. Here in our text, John mentions "the world" six times in these three verses. What is the world? It's the entire system of rebellion against God and his rule. F.F. Bruce says, "Worldliness...does not lie in things we do or in places we frequent; it lies in the human heart, in the set of human affections and attitudes." i.e., what we love and give ourselves to.

Later we hear: [I John 5:19 ESV](#) ¹⁹ We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. i.e., one has to pick sides.

Matthew 6:24 ESV ²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.[a]

Footnotes: [a] **Matthew 6:24** Greek mammon, a Semitic word for money or possessions

B. love The word love (**αγαπαω**) is the word that is used with regard to the world. We remember **John 3:16 ESV** ¹⁶ “For God so loved the world,[a] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Footnotes: [a] John 3:16 Or For this is how God loved the world

So **verse 15** in our text sounds like a contradiction when we are commanded NOT to love the world. But once Jesus died on the cross, we have a choice: love God or love Satan and the principles of this world that is under the Devil’s control presently. For the Christian, the world is not so much a foreign place - it simply isn’t home.

Some people will do anything to feel loved, appreciated and esteemed. They will compromise good standards and values and who we should please. As the Church in this passing-away world becomes more and more a minority, it will become more difficult to fit in and so compromise will be the flawed strategy of many. If a person compromises on his/her relationship with God, you enter into sin and Satan’s world and what is valued above God.

The world as John looks at it has desires for everything that is at odds with God’s values and plan for humanity. **I John 2:16 ESV** ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life[or *pride in possessions*—is not from the Father but is from the world. If pride in possessions is actually the best way to translate verse 16 then Richard Foster’s words certainly apply: Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 80 - “Because we lack a divine Center our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things. We really must understand that the lust for affluence in contemporary society is psychotic. It is psychotic because it has completely lost touch with reality. We crave things we neither need nor enjoy. We buy things we do not want to impress people we do not like.”

Don’t give your life away to things or people who have no future in God’s plans.

C. desire This 3rd word (**επιθυμια**) we are looking at can be a positive word or a negative one. It is used for a man who desires the office of elder (**I Timothy 3:1**). Here in our text it has a negative connotation. It is the idea of lust and things connected to the fallen nature. These are commodities that will never ultimately satisfy. We need to stop settling for substitutes and things that look valuable like fool’s gold, but are worthless.

Only in relationship with God through Jesus Christ will we receive true riches. No matter how high the price of precious metals go, what God can provide is worth far more.

I Peter 1:18-19 ESV ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Matthew 16:26 ESV ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

So be careful what you value and hold dear.

I John 2:17 ESV ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

One of John's favorite words (**μεινειν**) is sometimes translated live in, remain, or here abides is the rendering.

D. abides is a conditional relationship it seems to me. John illustrates this in his Gospel. It relates to obedience which John equates with love.

John 15:1-8 ESV ¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

The Apostle John wants the Church to know that the world is set up against Her not as an Advocate like Jesus, but an Adversary like the Devil. He is telling them and us about: **II. Satan's Seductive (Tempting) Toolbox.**

John warns the Church about:

A. desires of the flesh

In some translations we might see "lust of the flesh," and that is an accurate translation. Here though, we are talking not just about sexual sin. There is more to this world than our fleshly nature that demands to be satisfied.

This area of our life needs the help of the Spirit of God. I like how Barclay explains this (p. 68): “We need not think of this as the sin of the gross and blatant and notorious sinner. Anyone who demands a pleasure which may be the ruin of someone else, anyone who has no respect for the personalities of other people in the gratification of his own desire, anyone who lives in luxury while others live in want (the *Rich Man and Lazarus*, Luke 16:19ff), anyone who has made a god of his own comfort, and of his own ambition, in any part of life, is the servant of the flesh’s desire.”

This is similar to Paul’s list in [Galatians 5:19-21 ESV](#) ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy,[a] drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do[b] such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Footnotes: [a] Galatians 5:21 Some manuscripts add murder

[b] Galatians 5:21 Or make a practice of doing

Then there is the:

B. desires of the eyes

This kind of temptation or seduction involves the mind with what the eyes see. It may involve fantasy and letting the mind play out how you might use this opportunity for self. There are people who are enslaved to and addicted to pornography. This distorts what God’s gift is to us. The advertising industry promotes how to look good even though everyone knows that character is more important to God. He looks at our heart, not our physical appearance. No one will be judged by Jesus on the basis of outward style.

There were actually pharisees in Jesus’ time that were called “bleeding pharisees” because they would avert their eyes or even cover them to avoid looking at women or even sinners in general. They understood, even in their self-righteousness, that what you view can change your relationship with God and others.

Wasn’t the “desire of the eyes” what got Eve and Adam in trouble in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6) and brought death to every generation who would follow them?

and finally there is the:

C. pride of life

This pride is about boasting and arrogance. “It means the braggadocio which exaggerates what it possesses in order to impress other people.” - Rienecker, p. 788

C. H. Dodd calls this “pretentious egoism.”

William Barclay again is helpful here with illustration (p. 69) and explains the word that deals with pride and the braggart (*alonzeia*). Theophrastus, the great Greek master of the character study, has a study of this word, *braggart*. “He (the braggart) stands in the harbour and boasts of the ships he has at sea; he ostentatiously sends a messenger to the bank when he has a shilling to his credit; he talks of his friends among the mighty, and of the lettershe receives from the famous. (*He has at least 5000 friends on Facebook, and millions on Instagram and Twitter*). He details at length his charitable benefactions, and his services to the state. All that he occupies is a hired lodging, but he talks of buying a bigger house to match his lavish entertaining. His conversation is a continual boasting about things which he does not possess, and all his life is spent in an attempt to impress everyone he meets with his own non-existent importance.”

Bigger barns being built may only bring about your downfall and judgment! So again, be careful what you value and hold dear. **I John 2:17 ESV** ¹⁷.... the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

If you are giving yourself to what the world is offering rather than what God offers us, you are investing in commodities that have no future - like stock in Montgomery Wards.

III. Eternity Is in the Balance.

Yet, we many times will trade in now and the present in exchange for our eternal security. We act like Esau of old who was willing to trade away his birthright (inheritance) for some stew. There is more to life than what you see or even understand.

The question comes to the Church from John:

A. Will you invest badly?

The word life in **v. 16** is a translation of the Greek word *bios* where we get the idea of physical life. This is at odds many times with the kind of life (*zoe*) Jesus offers which is eternal. Jesus had had a conversation with the religious leaders in John 9 and also Nicodemus, in John 3. In John 9 the Pharisees are diagnosed as being blind because they thought they knew everything about life, yet the Author of Life was in their presence and they did not recognize Him or allow their blindness to be removed - all because of pride and arrogance.

Nicodemus, also a Pharisee, was at least asking questions of Jesus and wanting to know how he might right with God. Jesus said, Nicodemus, you must be born again - born from above. You need to be involved with the spiritual rather than the deceptive flesh.

John 3:5-7 ESV 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.[a] 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You[b] must be born again.’

Footnotes: [a] John 3:6 The same Greek word means both wind and spirit

[b] John 3:7 The Greek for you is plural here

B. Will you invest wisely?

Raymond Brown, I John, p. 327, helps with our understanding about Nicodemus, the wiser Pharisee. “Nicodemus would then represent (in John 3) a convert coming to Jesus and being instructed about the kingdom of God and about how a person can be begotten from above or born again. The instruction is centered on the incapacity of the flesh, the need for eternal life over natural life, and the need to turn one’s eyes to see the light from above. It is not surprising here in our text (2:15-17) to find our author warning his followers not to backslide on these points.” Brown goes on to say: “I John does not see the Evil One at work in paganism but in a world deprived of the Spirit.”

Sometimes amid the crazy business of this world we need to carve out time to be with God and in His Word. “Solitude is a place where Christ remodels us in his own image and frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the world.” - Henri Nouwen

Invest in God and His plan for you.

Conclusion: In 1989, Tom Sine wrote these insightful words that apply just as much now, as then (*Christianity Today* [3/17/89], p. 52):

Whatever commands our time, energy, and resources commands us. And if we are honest, we will admit that our lives really aren’t that different from those of our secular counterparts. I suspect that one of the reasons we are so ineffective in evangelism is that we are so much like the people around us that we have very little to which we can call them. We hang around church buildings a little more. We abstain from a few things. But we simply aren’t that different. We don’t even do hedonism as well as the folks around us ... but we keep on trying.

As a result of this unfortunate accommodation, Christianity is reduced to little more than a spiritual crutch to help us through the minefields of the upwardly mobile life. God is there to help us get our promotions, our house in the suburbs, and our bills paid. Somehow God has become a co-conspirator in our agendas instead of our becoming a co-conspirator in His. Something is seriously amiss.