

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus Christ, to our rescue. When everything appears to be lost, when we have been badly let down by friends, when we feel we have failed in things of importance, Lord Jesus Christ, be our very real Saviour. Bring gladness out of despair and joy out of trouble; and through our witness, show the world that failure and defeat is never the end because our God always has more for us that is good. We praise You, Lord Jesus Christ; AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: 'Anointing'

Pray for the anointing of the Lord on your home and family. Pray that this will enable God's peace, love, and grace to be found in your midst, and that it will be a guard against all evil.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the gift of music its use for worship within churches
- Pray for the nation of Iran and against evil and repression
- Ask the Lord to help us agree about how to look after our world

Meditation

You, Lord, have done so many things beyond our understanding:

You have created this magnificent world in which we live,
Yet for all our far-reaching physics, we can't find out how.

You have made life itself, because You are life itself,
Yet for all our science, we cannot create consciousness.

You have made the world more beautiful than anyone can imagine,
Yet for all our art, no artist can trump the beauty of a butterfly's wing.

You loved the world so much that You saved it from its evil,
Yet for all our philosophy, we cannot agree what good and evil are.

You have revealed Yourself throughout the history of the world,
Yet for all our spirituality, we stumble at the foot of the Cross.

You, Lord, have always been there in Creation for us to find,
Yet for all our striving, it is You who find us not we who find You.

May we respond to Your touch, and follow You.

Bible Study - 1 John 2:15-17

¹⁵ Do not love the world or what is in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything that is in the world, the passions of humanity, the desire to have what is seen and the arrogance that comes with wealth, this is not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Review

Here in his letter, John warns his readers against allowing worldly possessions and circumstances to become the focus of life, and as a consequence, allowing the authority of God to be marginalised. On the one hand, John's call is straightforward, and we recognise the importance of putting worldly things aside so that the love of God might be our sole motive and inspiration within life. On the other hand, what John says in verse 16 is difficult to put into action; it may be possible for us to achieve control over our desires with the help of Christ, but is it true that the love of God requires us to put all worldly things aside as if they were mere distractions to God's reality?

All Christians grapple with this dilemma, for none of us can live as if the world did not exist or the things within it had no power or significance for us. Life outside of this world and what we experience within it is inconceivable for us; we would not know the meaning of life without what it has to offer, moreover, our world was made first by God who saw that it was 'good' (Gen 1:10,12 etc.). Why then does John speak so disparagingly of 'the world', as if to dismiss it as irrelevant? Why does he appear to suggest that we would be better to become like monks or hermits who withdraw from the pleasures of the world to live in contemplation of the eternal love of God, sometimes in complete solitude?

To a certain extent, we must accept that it was typical of people of John's time to talk about things rather expansively in order to make a point. So just as Paul contrasts the evils of the flesh and the gifts of the Spirit (Galatians 5:15-26) in order to encourage God's people to aspire to higher standards of Christian living, so John contrasts the things of God with the things of this world to highlight the difference between good and evil, and between love and hate.

The whole of John's letter is about love and what it means, and the first verse of our text tells us that if we make the world the object of our love, then we have lost our way. Love is to be found through Jesus, and in the Father (2:15). Now, when John explains this further, everything we have been talking about comes into clearer focus. In giving examples of worldly things that should not be the objects of our love, John does not tell us that things such as houses, clothes or possessions are evil; he describes negative and damaging attitudes, desires and feelings. Specifically, he mentions human covetousness in general, which is the passion to have what is seen, and the arrogance of wealth that presumes that the one who owns things is superior to the one who does not.

John's message is all about attitudes. If we love the worldly things we possess or encounter in life then we place ourselves in danger, because the worst of humanity is exposed by the love of things, the love of power, and in some cases, the inappropriate or sexual love of other people. If our love is directed towards the God who made us, then He will correct our attitudes towards the things of this world, including the other people around us. Remember, John is the evangelist who brought us the great command of Jesus to 'love one another', but we can only do this in His strength and by His will.

Having looked at this passage carefully, we must therefore conclude that John did not intend to encourage us to have a negative attitude towards worldly things. He warned us not to have 'worldly' attitudes of covetous desire and arrogance towards things, but did not exactly encourage us to reject the world as intrinsically evil!

John concludes this short text with a timely reminder designed to put all things in perspective. The world is God's and it will end when He says, and when it does, the familiar things we all know will all 'pass away' (2:17). This message is not unique to John, it is typical of the whole of the New Testament and its various authors. In the early days of the church, people felt that this could happen at any moment, and this naturally directed people to trust in God for the future, and not the things of this world, its possessions, its wealth or its relationships and social structures. A decade or so ago, we might have

assumed that such a message was not something people would be very bothered about, however, in view of all that is happening to our planet at the moment, even those who do not have faith in Jesus wonder whether the world is coming to an end! For this reason, we have a great evangelistic opportunity to encourage people to believe that 'whoever does the will of God abides forever', and the only true fulfilment in life is found with the one true God who made heaven and earth.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss whether the world, or any part of it, is inherently evil. What does this passage contribute to this discussion?
2. In what ways do people love the things of this world inappropriately, and as a consequence, create great trouble for others?
3. What does this text mean by talking about 'whoever does the will of God', and what does this mean?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This passage in John has been used, along with others, by people who attempt to reject everything this world stands for. There have been many Christians over the centuries who have done this, and although some of them have been famous, few have left their mark on history or affected the world and its people for the greater good. John's point is clearly about attitudes, and we all know this to be true, for we judge each other by the attitudes demonstrated in what is said. One of the greatest things that the Lord Jesus can do in us is to change our attitudes towards others, for when we demonstrate genuine love, people will really know that we are God's people.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Do you have any possessions that create great passion within you? What do you really love? What do you need so much that you cannot contemplate being without? We should all consider these things carefully after reading John's comments here; they must be submitted to the Lord.*
- *Pray for young people growing up in a world in which there is so much to tempt them and distract them from the things of God. Pray that they will have the integrity to see through their casual and fleeting attractions and aspire to higher things.*

Final Prayer

Holy and majestic Father; You have seen civilisations come and go, and You have seen people respond to the good and evil in the world in many different ways. By Your Holy Spirit, guide us as we seek to do what is right and good for the sake of the world and all who live in it. Protect us from all evil we pray; AMEN