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# Being World Christians in a Dangerous World



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Message by Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor  
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Scripture Passage 1 John 2:12-17  
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One of the many challenges which churches face today, and frankly which they have always faced, is how to minister to and seek to meet the needs of different age groups. This tension/struggle often touches on the area of worship and styles of music although it is by no means limited to that.

The easy way out, the path of least resistance, would be to break a congregation up into different groups. Each meeting in a separate place. Each free to enjoy their own style of worship. We could be like some of today's movie theatres with different theatres each showing a different movie, so as you come into church you pick the style of service you want, simply go to a different location.

We could set one location aside where clapping is permitted, while another one is clearly marked NO CLAPPING!

Another section, hand-raising permitted.

Think about the worship options. We could gather all the folks over 50/60 or so, who like tossing the great hymns of the church, NO DRUMS ALLOWED!

The young people could meet in another area, turn up the speakers and sing rock and roll hymns.

We could have a folk service for all the people like me raised on folk music sing Kumbya. We know that the answer is blowing in the wind.

One of the unique challenges that the church has to work at is the struggle to be multi-ethnic and multi-generational, and what I would also call, multi-style, all at the same time. The church is perhaps the one place left where we need to struggle to do this and not take the path of least resistance. We need each other with all our different styles.

This spring we are studying a little book, just 105 verses, it is called 1st John, written almost 2000 years ago, but made alive by the Holy Spirit for us today. John writes to these Christians. He understood that there were three major groups in his congregation. I would suggest to you that you are somewhere in here. This is a multigenerational letter. There is something for everyone here.

## Chapter 2

**12 I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.**

**13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I**

**write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.**

**14 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.**

These may be age groups or perhaps people at different stages in their spiritual lives or perhaps as often happens, a bit of both.

When you untangle what he says to each group, here is what you find.

He writes to young children. We will take that to mean those who are new or relatively new Christians on the first steps of spiritual discovery, enjoying the first excitement of their new faith.

They have two things that are alive for them:

1. The sense of forgiveness. This is where we all start. This is the START HERE button for each of us. This is where we step onto the first rung of the ladder. Forgiveness is the initial gift

of God to all of us. This is what we first experience.

2. They knew that God as their Father. They have been adopted into the family of God. They had a family, a spiritual home.

Every church needs the enthusiasm and energy of new Christians. They bring life and vitality to the whole place. They make some of us remember the joy of new birth, the laughter of God in our lives. We need the simplicity and the freshness of new young Christians and young people. Sometimes some of us forget that initial joy. We become too settled down and too comfortable. We become stodgy and dull.

We need to see people coming to Christ. We need their initial joy and enthusiasm. Churches that don't have this are lacking in much.

Then he writes to the young men (and women!)

They are in the trenches of daily living as it were, where many of you are, raising families, working hard, giving time and energy to daily life, and to ministry, juggling work and family and church ministry. You need a strong grasp on the Word of God to fight and to be overcomers in the daily battles that you are in.

You need to be in the Word of God because you are in the trenches of daily life.

The third group he calls fathers. We will take that as the senior and most mature men and women of the faith and the church. We need you. You are rich in the stored experiences of faith. You are the people who have walked a long time with God. We need your wisdom and your faith. We need your years of experience. We need your stability. We need you to lead the way.

Then to all of us, no matter who you are in this spiritual continuum.

**15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

**16 For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world.**

**17 The world and its desires pass away, but the person who does the will of God lives forever.**

**Do not love the world.** This strong challenge to misplaced affection and this call to stand apart from the world has created all kinds of struggles and debates.

This command has led some people into monasteries to escape the temptations of the world, only to have to face the deeper darkness within their own lives. It has led people to a vows of silence, thinking that ending words will end the struggle, but it does not. It has created compounds and communes in which people have tried to escape the pressures of life and in some extreme cases, died rather than surrender.

Others have fled to the desert, but they have confused with solitude with loneliness. It has led churches to turn their backs on the very people they were sent to serve, and become fortresses rather than places of ministry and service. They have closed their doors rather than open their doors.

As a young Christian growing up in Scotland, I heard all kinds of sermons about not loving the world and what that might mean. Preachers created great long lists of all the things that we were not supposed to do or you would be loving the world. In 1966, the largest Baptist Seminary in the United States changed a rule it had held for all its students and faculty for 151 years. It was a rule against dancing, but after 151 years it was now OK for Baptists to dance.

If you have not danced for 151 years, would you actually know how to dance? And if you did know how to dance where did you learn???

A quiz for those 50 and over, who grew up in the Christian sub-culture.

As a young Christian, what were you taught in church that Christians should *not* do because this would mean loving the world?

Cultural taboos and rules are popular, especially as a group becomes more rigid because you did not have to think. All the thinking had been done for you. It was all spelled out. It often means the more rigid the group, the stricter the rules.

There are clear moral issues.

**Do not love the world.** So we need to look more deeply into the meaning of the word for world. It is a window to look through and learn that it has much to teach us.

The greek word for "world" is an English word that we use often, COSMOS. It really means order. The world reflects the order and harmony of the mind of God. It is predictable. The opposite is actually the word CHAOS.

There are three different dimensions which the Bible and especially the Apostle John give to this word *cosmos*. Three different understanding of the meaning of "*world*" that the Christian has to identify and understand.

### COSMOS #1

#### THERE IS A WORLD TO BE ENJOYED WITH GRATITUDE.

The first way in which the word cosmos is used in the Bible is to give us a picture of the world that has been made and created by the hand of God.

Psalm 24 — the earth is the Lord's. That is cosmos.

Psalm 19 — the heavens declare the glory of God. That is talking about cosmos.

Creation is the landscape of God. We have neither the detachment of a worldless God or the emptiness of a Godless world. That's Gnosticism. Rather God walks in the landscape of creation. He leaves his fingerprints on the muddy earth. He leaves his footprints in the sand.

### Romans 1:20

**For since the creation of the world (cosmos) God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood**

**from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.**

The world is where the invisible God made himself visible. His voice speaks into the silence and emptiness and things come into being. We are not alone. We see the beauty of the North shore. Mountains on a crisp fall morning or the snow on Mount Baker, and echo back WOW!

We are also told that all of the cosmos finds its climax in Jesus Christ.

Colossians "All things were created by him and for him and in him, all things hold together."

We are to hold the fruit of the earth in our hands and be filled with gratitude to a God who fills the earth with food. Essentially, we do not make anything grow, we do not create anything at all. All we do is move things around.

When John challenges us "not to love the world" he is not meaning the world in this way. We need to know that Christianity is not world-denying at this level. On the contrary, it is world affirming.

Remember gnosticism is dualistic, dividing the world into the spiritual and the material, and teaching that only the spiritual really mattered. Christianity cannot buy into that kind of gnostic dualism about

creation. We are to hold it with gratitude.

We are not pantheists, believing that God lives in inanimate things such as trees or rocks. Mother Earth is not the female version of the Creator God.

But a Christian view of creation is affirming of the world. We need to bow low each day as people with a deep sense of gratitude. Without gratitude, we will become arrogant, if we are not there already.

G. K. Chesterton said that the chief idea of his life was learning the practice of taking things with gratitude and not taking things for granted. He said that the worst moment of truth for an atheist was to come a moment of profound gratitude and realise that he did not have anyone to be thankful to.

Christians are to stand under the rainbow of cosmos, see the beauty, the order, the variety, the detail of all of creation and then look beyond it to see and worship the God who creates, and stand with humble thankfulness.

The earth as cosmos is the theatre of revelation. It is the stage that God builds for us to that we can see his glory and his power.

Remember the couplet from Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Earth's cramm'd with heaven  
And every common bush  
aflame with God –

But only those who see take  
off their shoes

The rest sit round and pluck  
blackberries.

## COSMOS #2

### THERE IS A WORLD OF PEOPLE TO BE LOVED.

John 3:16 says – for God so loved the world (cosmos).

Here John means the world as people. People who are the focus and object of the love of God. People are the primary reason that Jesus came from the heart of the Father. He came to seek and to save the world, the people who were lost.

It is part of the tragedy of Christianity that there have been times when, as well as being earth-denying, the church was also people-denying and turned its back on the very people that it was sent to reach. This is not the heart of God. The heart of God is towards people. His world. In this use of cosmos, the world is not the enemy. People are the victims of the enemy but God wants to set them free.

We are called to be the light of this cosmos.

In the cultural battle in which we often find ourselves, it is very easy to confuse moral issues with the Gospel. Moral issues are important, but they are not the reason Christ died. Jesus did not come to die to make us moral people. He died to make us new people.

It is easy for us to forget that the world, the cosmos, is made up of people for whom Christ died. The world as cosmos is the theatre of redemption. The audience is invited to watch the love of God hang on a cross.

## COSMOS #3

### THERE IS A WORLD TO BE HANDLED WITH CARE.

15 Do not love (agape) the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

When John says, do not love the world, the word he uses is **agape**. That word that is used to describe God's unconditional love for us, and the way in which we are to love one another. John dares to use this special Christian word for love, and says that we can love the world. You can agape God or agape the world, but you cannot do both at the same time.

It is what I would call, the tragedy of misplaced affection.

“Loving the world” is much more than a list of bad things. This is more than a list of wayward things that people do hoping they won’t get caught. This is a sample of all the different ways we can do things that rob life of its true meaning and eventually rob us of our true human-ness.

In this sense, cosmos is all the systems and strategies. It means the principalities and powers that are in opposition to the mind of God. It is all the ways in which the world violates the creation of God. It is all the ways in which the good gifts of God are turned inside out and used for evil ends. It is all the things that stand against the sovereign power of God and try to usurp his authority. It is the arrogance of Satan who tried to be as God and was cast out of heaven.

Sin is much more than doing a bad thing. Sin is all the ways in which we madly try to find meaning in life apart from God. We usually become gripped with some unhealthy and unwholesome obsession when some other righteous and good meaning we are looking for is not met.

To support, to encourage, to patronize, to finance, to defend all those things that are anti-God is to be no friend of God.

**16 For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world.**

**17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.**

He gives us 4 ways it can happen. 4 temptations.

#### **Temptation #1**

**We are tempted to find the meaning of life in selfishness - the lust of the flesh.**

Flesh by the way is not always physical. It is not necessarily sexual. Temptation works through our bodies, but it always starts in the heart.

It is the temptation to look out for No #1, ourselves. It is all the ways we climb the ladder to success and we don’t really care if other people are the rungs that we climb over.

#### **Temptation #2**

**we are tempted by the sensual nature of the world, the lust of the eyes.**

We live in a world that tempts our senses. We live in a pornographic world, by which I mean one that uses and teases all our visual senses to tempt us into everything. Advertising and commercials are not about information. They are about stimulating the senses, exciting the eyes, making us watch and want. Once they have done that, they have done their job. Our greed will usually do the rest.

Temptation usually begins with a look.

#### **Temptation #3**

**We are tempted in the area of pride.**

We want to show off, what we have, what we have bought, what we’ve done, what we’ve achieved.

#### **Temptation #4**

**We are tempted to invest our lives in what does not last.**

One of the marks of our society today is transience. Things do not last. Nothing is supposed to last, and so today’s urgent message is written on disposable paper because even the message is disposable.

Then we transfer this attitude from things, whether appliances, Kleenex and coffee cups, to relationships, and so relationships become disposable like Kleenex. It is part of our throw-away society. The last tragic throwaway, even life becomes disposable.

In strong contrast, one of the marks of the Christian is that they take a long-term view of life and history. Life is not short term and history is not a dead end.

Here is our challenge, and here is our tension. We are called to juggle these three worlds all at the same time. We are called to enjoy the world that God created. We are commanded to love the world of the people that God loves, and we are warned to live in this cultural world without being seduced by its greed or abducted by its power and raped by its pragmatism.

Jesus says to us,

You do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world." (John 15:19)

Some Christians and churches, responding to those words in a dozen different ways have retreated from society. Faith has removed itself from daily life. The public square of community life has become naked. The spiritual and the sacred has

been stripped from it and all we are left with is a world of spent sacred forces.

We have taken this word about not loving the world and in response, we have retreated from vast areas of society, leaving them desolate and barren of spiritual influence. Thousands of acres of community life, education, schools, politics at all levels, media, business, became stripped of Christian influence as Christians retreated to form a safe Christian sub-culture.

We believed the false propaganda that our faith was only to be a privatized faith. We retreated from the dangerous influences of the world and practiced our faith within the safety of our temples. In our withdrawal we were genuinely seeking not to love the world.

But Jesus also prays to his Father in his great prayer in John 17 in the shadow of the cross:

"My prayer is that you would not take them out of the world (cosmos), but that you protect them from the evil one."

(John 17:15)

The New Testament knows nothing of monasteries and monks, but only ordinary people living like Christians in the demanding everyday world.

Jesus is saying, you have got to live in the real world without loving the world.

Matthew 5 – the sermon on the mount.

You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world—the cosmos.

Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and praise your father in heaven.

What do we do?

Where do we start?

We must show our world that Christianity is more, much more than private belief, more than personal salvation, more than singing our hymns behind closed doors on a Sunday morning. Christianity is a cosmic view of life. It is a cosmic world view that answers the deepest questions of human life: Why am I here? What am I supposed to do? Does this life have meaning and purpose?

Only Christianity offers a bifocal view of life, bringing together the physical and the spiritual, the natural and the moral order, the private world and the public world. We need to hear the challenge of the Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper ringing in our ears:

**There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out—This is mine! This belongs to me!**

So the next time you are in the Downtown Eastside, see a girl standing at a street corner waiting for her next customer or see someone in an alley putting a needle in their arm, say to yourself Jesus says, this street is mine! This alley belongs to me!

The next time you look at the Law Courts or pass a hospital or a school or pass a community centre, say to yourself Jesus says, this is mine, this belongs to me! When you go into your office tomorrow, when you see your desk where you work, hear Jesus say to you, This is mine! This belongs to me! And he says to people, to his people, I have called you out of the cosmos, so that you can be the light in the cosmos.

We know that evil lives in the systems, in the principalities and powers of our modern world. We know that creation bears the scars of our misuse and the beauty of God's creation is often littered with the garbage that we have created. We know that living the Christian faith is a relentless challenge between good and evil, between the perfect and actual, but the fact that it is a challenge does not

mean we do not engage it, rather it means we engage it all the more vigorously.

So if you are a new Christian, enjoy the forgiveness of God, be part of his family, and do not love the world—love God!

If you are one of the young men and women, be strong in God's word, you are fighting the battle every day, and do not love the world—love God!

If you are seasoned in the faith, keep on going, don't slow down, and do not love the world—love God!