



DO YOU LOVE THE WORLD?

The Bible is full of “caution lights” warning us when we are about to head off course and into spiritual trouble. John issues one of those warnings to us in 1 John 2:15 (NIV), *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* It is quite interesting that John tells us to not love the world with the very same Greek words that Jesus used when He told us that “God so loved the world” in John 3:16. Since we know that God cannot contradict Himself, there must be a way in which we are to love the world and a way in which we are to *not* love the world. We can understand this apparent contradiction in the following way.

A spiritually healthy love for the world desires to give something to it—namely the gospel. John 3:16 continues, *For God so loved the world that he gave...* A spiritually sick love for the world desires to get something from it. 1 John 2:16 (NIV) says, *For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.* What is troubling about John’s warning is that it doesn’t give us much guidance on how to identify whether we do in fact love the world and the things of the world. We cannot just look at our words. We must also look at our hearts and observe our actions to determine if we are indeed in love with the world and the things of the world. The Bible gives us four flashing “caution lights” that should warn us that we might indeed have gotten into an illicit love affair with the world and the things of this world.

Caution Light #1: We are falling in love with the world when... we are never quite satisfied with what we have.

Solomon warns in Ecclesiastes 5:10 (NIV), *Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.* Are you truly satisfied with what you have right now? If you never got anything more for the rest of your life, would that be okay with you? Or do you find yourself drawn to the newest technology gadget, a bigger or better car, another exotic travel destination, the latest fashion, a newer or bigger home, or another way to make money? Is your life characterized by wanting and getting more stuff?

Solomon again cautions us in Ecclesiastes 6:7, *All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.* Is your appetite satisfied with what you have right now, or will it take more? If “more” is descriptive of the way you think about the things of the world and the way you live in the world, Caution Light #1 is flashing.

Caution Light #2: We are falling in love with the world when... the things we own end up owning us.

Jesus reminded us that we only have one throne and He wants to be on it. He tells us in Matthew 6:24 (ESV), *‘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.' Demas was one of Paul's mission entourage. Paul was grieved to report to Timothy in II Timothy 4:10 (NASB) that *Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me.* That is what happens when we love the world and the things of the world. You cannot have both on the same throne.

Jesus tells us in Luke 12:15, *'Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.'* We can possess things, but things better not possess us. It is easy enough to get so emotionally attached to our things that we do not want to part with them or give them away. The greater our love for our things, the more tightly we grip them. The great holocaust survivor Corrie Ten Boom often spoke these words of wisdom, "Hold loosely to the things of this life, so that if God requires them of you, it will be easy to let them go." What was the rich young ruler's obstacle to following Jesus? *But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property* (Matthew 19:22). He didn't own his possessions; his possessions owned him. And they would not let go of him. If you find that your things own and control you, Caution Light #2 is flashing.

**Caution Light #3: We are falling in love with the world when...
worry about losing our things is disrupting our inner peace.**

Recent economic times have certainly given us all ample opportunity to discern if worry about material loss has been disrupting our inner peace. When times are good, we may never even notice Caution Light #3. But when retirement funds shrink, the value of our real estate is in decline, and our business revenues are off substantially, all this can reveal a love for the world and the things of the world that we may have never really noticed. Paul reminds us that our financial condition should have nothing to do with our inner peace and contentment in life. He says in Philippians 4:11-12, *Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.*

Being content when you have an abundance can be easy, but being content with less—or much less—than we have grown comfortable with can be very unsettling and reveal the actual depth of our affection for the things of this world. If you have placed your faith in what you possess instead of in the One who has provided those possessions to you, you are in danger. Hebrews 13:5 points this out clearly, *Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.'* If we were stripped of all our worldly possessions and stood penniless, would we still be content and filled with inner peace, confident that our loving Father is still on the throne and will never, ever forsake us? If you are struggling with a disquieted spirit as you worry over your net worth falling and your cash flow shrinking, Caution Light #3 is flashing.

**Caution Light #4: We are falling in love with the world when...
our longing to be there is diminished by our affection for what we have here.**

Mrs. Jones asked her eight-year-old Sunday school class, "How many of you would like to go to Heaven?" Every child in the class raised his hand except Billy. Mrs. Jones asked curiously, "Billy, don't you want to go to Heaven?" He replied, "Sure I do, I just thought you were taking up a busload right now!" Billy was glad to go to Heaven, just not right now. An elderly grandmother had a heart attack and fell into unconsciousness. Her daughters decided to have the doctors insert a pacemaker to keep her alive. When she awoke she was furious

to find herself still in the hospital and still alive. She so longed to go to be with the Lord that, in her view, the lifesaving intervention of a pacemaker only prevented her from getting where she longed to go.

Remember what Paul said in II Corinthians 5:8, *...prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.* If you were given the choice today, would you prefer to go be with the Lord or would you prefer to stay here? Are you more like Billy or the grandmother? If you have nothing more than a casual interest in being there, Caution Light #4 is flashing.

The alluring appeal of the world and the things of the world are very subtle and can sneak up on any of us at any time. This world will begin wrapping its insidious tentacles around us and before we even realize it, we are trapped. This is the very thing the parable of the seeds describes in Matthew 13:22, *And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

As we live in this materialistic culture, may we all keep our eyes carefully peeled for these four caution lights so as to not unintentionally become an illicit lover of the world and the things of the world. Hebrews 12:1-2 challenge us, *Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of [our] faith.*” May this be so for all of us.

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