

# Loving **OTHERS** ... *instead of the World*

1 John 2:15-17

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Remember Susan? She reads her bible. Says her prayers. Goes to church. Believes in Jesus. Most of the week though, she pretty much does her thing and lives like everybody around her. Fits in pretty well with her surrounding culture. Like Susan, you might also believe in Jesus and consider yourself a Christian, a follower of Jesus. But what does it *mean* to follow Jesus? And how do you *know* if you're really following Him or not? What's the correlation between what you *say you believe* and how you *live* your life?

Remember Cerinthus, one of the *Gnostics* of John's day, who separated the body from the spirit, the physical from the spiritual, teaching that physical matter was evil? And so, you should strive to *ascend* from the *material* to the *spiritual*. Strive to become "super-spiritual," advanced and superior, and really without sin. *Spiritual*, but not religious.

The human spirit occupies itself with the things of God, while the body could do as it pleased. Thus, a lofty, mystical devotion to higher things, was entirely consistent, with a self-centered, please-seeking, sensual lifestyle. A total divorce between the higher, spiritual life and the lower, everyday life. Between what you *believe*, and how you *live*.

What does the Apostle John say about all of this? *If we say we have koinonia (fellowship) with [God] while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.* (1 John 1) *And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him ... By this we may know that we are in Him: whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.* (1 John 2)

If you *think* you're a Christian, and yet continually, purposefully, intentionally live a sinful, self-centered lifestyle, you're not. You're lying to yourself. You're not saved. You're not a child of God. You won't be in heaven one day. You're following in the footsteps of Cerinthus, the one who also denied the deity of Jesus. Again, John's response?

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us - that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have **fellowship** with us; and indeed our **fellowship** is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

A real crucified and risen, flesh and blood Savior, for real flesh and blood sinners! It's not about *us* ascending from the physical to the spiritual. It's about the *spiritual* - namely, the divine heavenly Son of God - *descending* to us.

*No one born of God [Are you born of God?] makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.* (1 John 3)

Cain had a problem with his brother Abel. Abel's offering was acceptable and his was not. So Cain's solution? Kill Abel. Esau had a problem with his brother Jacob. Jacob had stolen both his birthright and his blessing and he was mad. So Esau's solution? Kill Jacob ... though Jacob fled before he could do it.

Joseph's brothers had a problem with him. He was their father's favorite and they were jealous. So their solution? Kill Joseph. They wound up selling him into slavery instead, but their first thought was to kill him. Pharaoh had a problem with the people of Israel. There were too many of them. So Pharaoh's solution? Kill them. Kill all the male babies born to Israel. Throw them into the Nile.

King Saul had a problem with a young upstart named David - people were talking about him and honoring him more. So King Saul's solution? Try to kill David. Not too long later, David had a problem because of the affair he had with his neighbor's wife. She was pregnant and David needed to cover that up. So David's solution? Kill her husband, Uriah. (James Douthwaite)

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." (Matthew 5:21-22)

What about you? Have you ever thought: If only this person would go away, my life would be so much better? And so, maybe instead of a gun or a knife, you pulled out your words, and stabbed them repeatedly with your criticism, or in your heart? Or you, as we say, "threw them under the bus"? Or you did a little character assassination. Notice how even our clichés incorporate the idea of death? There's a reason for that. Because that's what we're trying to do, really, isn't it? Just respectfully. (Douthwaite)

The Apostle John sees the danger of this attitude, not only in the world, but in the church as well. Among God's children. Those like Cerinthus, encouraged such behavior by their separation of the body from the spirit. Separating some lofty "spiritual" experience, from everyday living. Encouraging a different kind of spirituality, which was really not spiritual at all, but only fleshly. Of the world. A deep, earthly, self-centeredness, *disguising* itself as something higher and better and spiritual.

And so, John writes, "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." He or she is not a child of God, but a child of the devil. *For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life - is not from the Father but is from the world.*

The Apostle Paul describes this *worldliness* in this way. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." (Ephesians 2)

*We know that we are from God [born again], and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.* (1 John 5:19)

Where does evil come from? Jesus said it's from within. In our hearts. Our natural state as people, as sinners. Our worldly state, as opposed to a heavenly state. "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander." (Matthew 15:19)

How often our heart is of this world, this evil world, the things of this world, as opposed to the things of God. *Cravings. Lust. Boasting.* We even see hints of this in the beginning. "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate ..." (Genesis 3:6)

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. ... For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life - is not from the Father but is from the world. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life [in this world] will lose it, and whoever loses his life [in this world] for my sake will find it".* (Matthew 10:37-39)

Our world and God's world. One is all about *me* and *my* will. It's totally curved in upon Itself. Its god is Itself. It worships Self. Serves Self. Sacrifices all others at the altar of Self. Self is the center of its world!

*By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.* (1 John 3:10) Our world and God's world. An earthly kingdom and a heavenly kingdom. One is turned inward, away from God. The other is turned outward, toward God and others. *And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.* [And how would you summarize the commandments? LOVE!] (1 John 2)

*For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.*

*... We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.* (1 John 3:11-15)

*By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us ...." Self-giving, self-sacrificial. Love goes to the utmost. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." That's how much Jesus loves you!*

Our world, and God's world. An earthly kingdom and a heavenly kingdom. One, turned inward. The other, turned outward, toward others. This is what John has in mind, when he writes, *"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."*

Well, now this sounds kind of heroic, doesn't it, laying down your life for the brothers? It sounds like we're making the ultimate sacrifice, falling on the grenade, so to speak. Well, if it came to that, I guess we would do it. But that kind of sacrifice, involving physical death, doesn't come along very often.

More often - in fact, very common - is what? The laying down of our life that calls for giving up on our self-will, our self-interest, in order to help another in need. And this can happen a lot. Pretty much every day, in fact. You see, it's not just the big act of sacrificial love that rolls around once in a blue moon. No, it's more like the countless little acts of love that we can do on a daily basis. That's how we generally find opportunities to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

*"We ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."* Then John explains what that looks like: *"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."*

Love is an *action* word. This Christ-like love takes the initiative and actually helps others. It's not just a warm and fuzzy feeling. No, love works, it acts, in practical ways. That's what Jesus did when he laid down his life for us. So too, we lay down our lives for the brothers in deed and in truth.

This active love, this help - sometimes it's financial and material, when we have the world's goods, and we can give a portion of it away in a way that will help others. Those others may be brothers and sisters right here in our own congregation, members in need of some help and assistance. They may be brothers and sisters halfway around the world.

Sometimes opportunities for love may not even cost very much money. Instead, they may call for our time or our patience or our thoughtfulness. For example, bringing dinner over for a family dealing with a surgery or a hospitalization. Providing a ride to church or to a doctor's appointment. Making a phone call to see how somebody's doing. Endless opportunities to put love into action. (Charles Henrickson)

*Do not love the world or the things in the world .... For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life - is not from the Father but is from the world.*

**Colossians 3** *If then you have been raised with Christ, **seek the things that are above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your minds on things that are above**, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.*

*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ... Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

*The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. Our world and God's world. An earthly kingdom and a heavenly kingdom. One turned inward, away from God and others. The other turned outward, toward God and others. "And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us." (1 John 3:23) Believing in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, who lays down His life in love. And then loving others as you have been loved.*