

1 John 2:15-17

Oct.27th 2013

Let's do some simple exercises to begin. I actually found these while reading Luther's Large Catechism (CPH, p.119-121). So I'm asking you to actually do these. OK?

1. Pinch yourself and see if you have flesh. Go ahead. Well, do you?
2. Ask the person sitting next to you if you are still in the world. Go on and ask. Are you?

If you answered "no" to the two of those, would you please see me after church? (I always like to know when we are entertaining angels.) For the rest of us, the Holy Spirit has some strong words of warning for us today. In our battle against sin, look at how large / how wide-spread a force we face. **You're up against the world!**

Read 1 John 2:15-17. 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 man who does the will of God lives forever.

Kids, let's make sure you all understand a meaning here. Sometimes "the world" means everything that God has created. Other times God's Word refers to all people as "the world." You've learned John 3:16 in Sunday School: "*God so loved the world.*" God also tells us to "*love our neighbors*" - who are the people of the world.

But now, the Holy Spirit inspires John to write "*Do **not** love the world.*" What does he mean? Well, in school when you don't understand the meaning of a word, your teachers may tell you to use the context ~ the words around it ~ to help figure out the meaning. So when I do that here, I find that "the world" refers to all rebellion against God ~ all sin-perverted desires and actions. About this, he says: "*Everything in the world comes not from the Father.*"

John gives 3 examples to make the phrase "*everything in the world*" clear to us:

- "the cravings of the sinful flesh" - God has filled our lives to the brim with blessings and activities to enjoy. When he does tell us to avoid something, he is actually protecting us (and others) from danger/damage to our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. But the sinful flesh tries to convince us that all the things God forbids are shortcuts to and sure sources for happiness. The world tries to get us to buy the lie: "The end justifies the means." And we fall for it: "I'll do anything to get what I want." The sinful flesh promises fulfillment from such approaches, but. . . it lies. People end up always wanting more... craving more.

The 2nd example John uses is:

- "the lust of the eyes" - God has gifted us with the mysterious union of marriage, where a man and a woman can enjoy sexual intimacy, companionship, and raise children together. The sinful flesh, with its evil desires, wants sexual gratification on its own terms ~ especially without what many call "all the baggage." Individuals reeling from being used & rejected, a trail of wrecked marriages, and vulnerable and hurting children are the aftermath.

The 3rd example of the "*everything in the world*" that John says not to love is:

- "*the boasting of what one has and does*" - God has lovingly and uniquely formed each of us. He packs our lives with meaning and purpose. Those talents we have? They're from God. That money we have? It's from God. But the sinful flesh, never satisfied, wants more than what God has given and wants more praise and attention from others for all I have and all I'm able to do.

That boasting ~ that desire for recognition ~ is seen in the way humans by nature envision themselves standing before God. "God, I've done this, and this, and this. . ." (Do you recall the voice of the ruler from our Gospel lesson - Luke 18:21?)

God's Word replies:

- "*Everything that does not come from faith is sin*" (Romans 14:23b), "*without faith it is impossible to please God*" (Hebrews 11:6), and "*nothing good lives in... my sinful nature*" (Romans 7:18)

We, as confessional Lutherans, acknowledge the truth: at one time our sinful flesh had total control over us. Totally rebellious, we were blind to the sin and guilt that held us fast. But God loved us so much! He broke the chains of our guilt by willingly taking our punishment. God poured out his love – he poured out his own life to set us free – free to be His, and to live with Him forever in His kingdom. Our sinful flesh no longer rules in us. But ~ be warned! It doesn't give up. It hates to hear us admit our sins. It hates to hear us state the depth of its depravity and our dire need of God. So...

When we sin, it propositions us with ways to rationalize and excuse our wrongs.

Remember the Children of Israel described in our Old Testament reading. Remember the time Moses was up on Mount Sinai, and they asked Aaron to make them the idol calf. Aaron's excuses might sound feeble, when read off the Old Testament page: *"You know how prone these people are to evil... I threw the gold in the fire, and out came this calf."* What do you think - feeble sounding? How about - familiar sounding? I have no doubt that a Divine Record of any of our lives – put on paper – would reveal some very shallow rationalizations, excuses for loving pleasures and idolizing things. How many feeble excuses for failing to love God above all things have we come up with?

Give yourself a pinch. You still have flesh. Yes? Look around to see if you're still in the world. You are? Then, the Holy Spirit has important words for you: *"do not love the world, or anything in the world. For everything in the world – the cravings, the lust, the boasting – comes not from the Father, but from the world."* In a capsule size statement, the truth is: You're up against the world.

I'll tell you right now... that capsule size dose of reality shouldn't lead you, the Christian, to give up. God's desire today is to lead you back to the news of sin's defeat.

That's where we are making a bee line - straight for the gospel, the Good News of what Jesus has done for us. And here are the two reasons why:

1. the gospel comforts us – it gives us the healing found nowhere else, as we admit before God our vast failure to *"love Him above all else."*
2. the gospel renews in us the determination and the strength to fight against *"everything that comes from the world"*

Dig right down to the gospel at the end of vs.17: *"The one who does the will of God lives forever."* Here the gospel is spotlighted with the simple promise: *"This one... lives forever."* To live forever!

Dig outward from this spot in 1 John to uncover more fully the gospel jewel shining up at us.

- Who is meant by "the one who does the will of God, who lives forever"? Listen to John a chapter later in this same book: (3:23) *"And this is God's command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ."* (cf: John 6:28-29)
- Even that belief is a creation of God, as John goes on later to say: (5:1,4) *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. ... Everyone born of God overcomes the world."* Hallelujah!
- John really wants to drive this point home. He repeats: (5:5) *"Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."*
- So, be assured: (5:11) *"God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; and he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."*
- That life is yours already now through faith. What's included in that life? John writes earlier in ch.2: (2:12,14) *"Your sins have been forgiven on account of his name."* *"The Word of God lives in you."*

- Finally, *“See that what you have heard ... remains in you. If it does, you will also remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us – even eternal life. ...remain in him.”* (2:24,27)

God assures us, as believers, of our eternity in Heaven. His home is ours through Jesus Christ. This fact shapes the way we think. Now, instead of boasting about what we have and what we've done, we boast in Christ Crucified for us (Galatians 6:14) and Christ risen. This empowers us as we struggle against “the world.” Now, instead of being controlled by the cravings of our sinful flesh, we want what is in line with the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:5-9).

So, you children here today: You carry with you the news that God has made you and God has saved you. Remembering that will help you to fight the temptation to boast - “I'm better than you.” If you win at a sporting event, you can praise God. If you lose, you can praise God. If you are at the top of your class, you can thank the Lord. If your best effort lands you somewhere in the middle, you can still thank Him. Instead of “I'm better than you, because I have the latest release of the PlayStation” or “because I'm **so** popular”, you carry in your heart the joy of having the Lord's love. Say: “I'm God's child” & “I'm forgiven.”

You teens and single adults: Couples may seem to be everywhere. You may be hoping to have a boyfriend/girlfriend too. The Lord, who made you, can one day lead you to the blessing of a “match” for marriage – if that's in His good will for you. Maybe that means no boyfriend or girlfriend for now is best, to help you avoid being tempted or pressured toward sin. If you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, view them as another soul precious to God, to help you avoid being tempted or pressured into sin. Recognize, too, God gives you other activities into which to pour your energy and attention, and find satisfaction in ways God-pleasing: sports, outdoor recreation, music, studying and/or work. Ultimately, find contentment in knowing you are valued and loved by your Lord. You have the care and attention of God himself, who loved you first, your first love.

Adults, 20-somethings, middle-agers, and beyond: You carry with you the assurance that you have worth and purpose. It doesn't come from what you accomplish, or what you accumulate. It comes from God. In Christ, through Christ, you see: you are valuable to him, and your purpose is to praise him. So... You don't have to overspend to keep up with the neighbors, or overextend your credit and overload your schedule in chasing after every pursuit. Serve your family and others, do your work, enjoy life, and in it all: prioritize your Lord.

All this is our glad response, for...

- we are freed in Christ – freed from sin, from the devil's accusations, and from hell.
- we are a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph.2:10). We live for the One who loves us, who died for us.

So, pinch yourself. This time, pinch yourself to see if you're dreaming. When you feel the answer “no, I surely felt that, I'm not dreaming” and “yes, the words in front of my eyes are all still there and real,” then rejoice. Rejoice in God your Savior, and love him above all else!