



I haven't sung that song, *Better is One Day* in a long time. I really love that song, but the words are very convicting to me, "Better is one day in your house than thousands elsewhere." Do you really believe that all the time? Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. Like Angie, the fictional 20-something woman in the video, I often find myself living in the tension of my love for God and my love for this world. More than anything, I want to love God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength, but this world and the things of this world often occupy too much of my attention. The Christian band, Cademon's Call, in their song, *This World* pinpoints for me the struggle we face, "This world has nothing for me and this world has everything. All that I could want and nothing that I need." How do we live in the world but not be of the world? That seems to be the question Angie is wrestling with. She's in her 20's, her career is taking off, she is making money, she's got friends and freedom. It's an exciting time of life for her. "I love God," she writes, "Do I have to hate everything else?" I bet some of you have found yourself asking the same kinds of questions from time to time.

John the Elder and Apostle continues his love letter addressing these very issues. Here we begin to see practical applications to those three categories in John I've mentioned before. The letters of John can be divided into three categories or tests of the Christian faith—Right Belief (doctrine); Right Behavior (obedience); and Right Relationships (love). In verses 12–14, we will see John's pastoral heart as he encourages the church with several reminders of who they are in Christ. Then in verses 15–17, he will give the church a stern warning to not love the world. Let's look first at his words of encouragement for the church.

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

**I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the
beginning.**

**I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.**

**I write to you, dear children,
because you know the Father.**

**I write to you, fathers,
because you know 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
(1 John 2:12–14)**

A Word of Encouragement

We have a tendency to remember what we need to forget and forget what we need to remember. John wants us to remember some very important truths about our standing with Jesus Christ. John addresses three different groups of people in the church—children, fathers, and young men. There are a few different ways to interpret who these people are. John could simply be speaking of their ages. But, another way to look at these groups is to see them as stages of spiritual maturity. I think that is what he is saying. Children are new believers. Fathers are spiritually mature Christians. And young men are somewhere in between the two.

Some of you are children in the faith. You are new Christians and just learning how to walk with Jesus. There is a sense of excitement and passion in your life because everything is new. There's nothing more I love than spending time with new Christians. Your simple faith and childlike trust in God is encouraging to those of us who have walked with God longer. Some of you are very mature Christians. You've been a follower of Jesus for decades. Your wisdom and depth is vital to the life of our church. Many of us just want to be around you because of your wisdom, maturity, and place in life.

I got to spend time with two different friends of mine who are both 80 years old. Marianne Breaux is a saint who's walked with Jesus for a long time and usually makes our church coffee almost every Sunday. I also had lunch with another friend who is 80 years old and he's been a pastor for over 60 years. His wisdom and maturity in the faith is stunning. I thank God for old and godly men and women! Then there's a third group John addresses. I would bet that most of you here at the North Campus are the young men or women John writes about. You are not a baby Christian, but you are also not an older and super mature Christian either. The initial fire and passion for Jesus has matured. You've weathered a few storms in life. You know your Bible well. You're trying your best to love God and your neighbor as yourself. Like CPC, the early church had these three types of Christians as well. All are important and vital to the health of a church.

John then gives three examples of why these Christians should have confidence in who they are in Christ. These words of assurance are for all of us, no matter where we are in our sanctification. John the Elder reminds the church first of forgiveness in verse 12, *"I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name."* John uses the perfect tense of the verb forgiveness to stress that a child of God has been forgiven and remains forgiven. A child of God embraces forgiveness at his conversion and continues to enjoy forgiveness throughout his life on the account of his name. Whose name is John referring to? Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter if you've been a Christian for a long time or only a few days. Understanding and enjoying the forgiveness of Jesus is a life long process.

If you were with us at the Outdoor Service last Sunday, you know I talked a lot about forgiveness. I said that forgiveness costs us nothing because it cost Jesus everything, even his life. Until you come to understand the fact that you've been forgiven of your sins you'll never be able to truly forgive people who've hurt you. Forgiveness not shown in forgiveness not known. After placing my faith in Jesus in 1994, I remember feeling such a sense of peace as the burden and weight of my sin, guilt and shame was lifted off my shoulders. My heart was cleansed of sin in a single moment of faith and I was overwhelmed with tears of joy. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ your past, present, and future has been forgiven. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). He has removed your sins as far as the East is from the West (Psalm 103:12). John wants you to enjoy God's forgiveness in Jesus every day. Are you living with a clear understanding that you are forgiven? How is that having an impact on your life?

John the Elder continues to encourage the church by saying they also know Jesus and the Father. Three times John says they know him from the beginning and they know the Father. Since the beginning of his coming in the flesh, the church has known Jesus and God. John wrote about this earlier in his Gospel. He said, to know Jesus is to know the Father. To know the Father is to know Jesus. You want to know who God is and what He is like? Look no further than Jesus. The church does not just know facts about Jesus; they know Him intimately. There is a relationship with Him. God doesn't just want our obedience to his commands; that's religion. God wants us to know Him so personally that His thoughts become our thoughts, His ways our ways and His desires our desires. That is a relationship. This happens when we regularly drink deeply the Word of God, the Bible. When we fill our minds and our hearts with the Scriptures, we are transformed so that we love what He loves and hate what He hates¹. The Apostle Paul wrote about this process of transformation so beautifully in Romans 12:1-2, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a*

living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good, pleasing and perfect will."

The Apostle Paul is saying here that there are no shortcuts to godliness. God wants us to offer ourselves to Him, turn away from the things of this world, and be transformed. That's what it means to know God. Do you have an intimate relationship with Jesus? How are you being transformed by the Word of God?

The last word of encouragement John gives the church is that they have the power to overcome the evil one. This is so important that John repeats himself. *"I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one"* (v. 13b), and *"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"* (v. 14b). How have these young men overcome the Evil One, the Devil? They have overcome because the word of God lives in them. God Himself, the Word, the *logos*, through the power and person of the Holy Spirit, lives in them.

Some of you need to remember today that the God of the universe lives in you! And last time I checked, God is greater than the Devil. Listen to what John writes later in this letter, *"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"* (1John 4:4). It doesn't matter what you are going through or what you are up against, God is with you; He'll help you overcome. Are you feeling defeated this morning? Is your back against the wall? The victory has been won in Jesus, but there is still fighting to be done. John's reminding you, child of God, that you are strong, the Word of God lives in you and you are an overcomer. Are you fighting back? Are you experiencing His power to overcome temptation and the Devil in your life?

John is going to shift gears next by sending a strong word of warning to his children in the faith. We all need encouragement and assurance in our walk with the Lord, but that's not all we need. The reality is that we still live in a world that is opposed to God. We don't just need encouragement; we need warning. We don't just need a pat on the back; we need a kick in the pants.

A Word of Warning

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 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. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever (verses 15–17).

To understand this passage you have to be aware of how John defines the world. We believe God created the world and said that it was good. We also know God so loved the world that He

¹ Thanks to Kevin DeYoung and his book, *Just Do Something*, for this insight

sent His one and only Son into the world to save the world from sin, Satan and death. When John uses the word *cosmos*, he is describing for us the earthly system of values, beliefs, and behaviors that are in opposition to God and His purposes. When John talks about the world, he is referring to a way of life that ignores God and His rule. John uses a strong verb tense in this paragraph, a present imperative, that should grab our attention—**do not love the world**. The point John is making is you can't love the world and God at the same time. It's like placing one foot in a canoe and keeping the other foot on the dock. Ever try to do that? You fall in the lake! You can't have your feet in both worlds. It's impossible to love God and embrace the customs and lifestyle of the world. Like Angie from our video, many of us have tried to do just that and we are left feeling empty and disappointed. John is saying it doesn't work; you have to commit to one or the other.

How do you know then if you love the world? John tells us what the love of the world looks like. He gives us three descriptions, three ways to measure our love for the world in verse 16, *“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.”* Let's look at each of these three descriptions.

First, the lust of the flesh. The word “lust” can be translated as desire or cravings. The word “flesh” primarily describes what we do with our bodies. It's important to understand that desire is not a bad thing. The word itself is neutral. Lust begins with a healthy desire but then takes it to an unhealthy extreme. I desire food when I am hungry. That's normal. But constantly overeating is gluttony. Eating to make ourselves feel better and numb the pain is problematic. Drinking a cold beer on a hot afternoon is not sinful, neither is enjoying a glass of wine at dinner. But, drinking to get hammered and needing alcohol to function is a problem. Desiring a woman and wanting to have sex with her is a great thing so long as it is your wife. God has given us great desires for pleasure and He wants us to enjoy them for His glory. He's the One who created all our senses! To enjoy good food, good drink, and intimacy with our spouse is a gift from God. Here's what the world does—it takes what God intended for good and twists and perverts it for evil. Often times this happens through the lens of our very own eyes. That's what John says next.

The lust of the eyes is often where our love for the world begins. There is nothing wrong with seeing a beautiful woman and saying to yourself, “Wow, good job God!” Martin Luther famously said, “You can't help it when a bird flies over your head but you don't have to allow it to make a nest in your hair.” That's how it is with the lust of the eyes. Like our culture today, John lived in a very sensual world. These false teachers were infecting the church with the lie that you could do anything with your body because it doesn't affect your spirit. We see this problem in the church today. Pornography and all that is associated with it is a major issue with many Christian men (and women). We

think it doesn't affect our souls, but it does. Pornography is a terrible addiction but there is hope. Through Christian Counseling, recovery and accountability groups, many men here at CPC are getting help to overcome. The lust of the eyes is not limited to sexual attraction either. We can lust after things. There is nothing sinful about admiring a new car or new home. But, it's when those desires lead to covetousness that we get into trouble. It's when we become consumed and preoccupied with what we see and want that leads to worldliness. When greed is aroused by what we see, when we desire that which we can't afford or can't have, our hearts become divided.

The third and final description of worldliness is the pride of life or the pride of possessions. Again, there is nothing wrong with material things. It's a good thing to wear new clothes, have a place to live, and have a means of transportation if God should provide the resources for them. There is nothing sinful with being wealthy either. There were plenty of godly and wealthy Christians in the Bible and in the church today. The issue for John is when you desire a particular thing, when you are prepared to spend whatever it takes or do whatever you can to get it, when your identity and happiness depends on it, when your desire turns to lust, and having whatever “it” is becomes more important than having God. When a person becomes arrogant and proud and boasts about their position in life and what they've accumulated, they've become worldly. John warns us here against materialism.

Here on the Peninsula there is a reckless pursuit of success that compels people to bend the rules, to beat everyone else so that we can feel good about ourselves. We send our kids to SAT prep classes in elementary school because they need to get ahead. We spend ridiculous amounts of money and time on sports because our kids just might make it professionally. All this comes at the expense of our relationship with God. We don't leave ourselves any margin to make it to church, be involved in a small group or to serve the Body of Christ. Our priorities are elsewhere. Am I stepping on anyone's toes yet? You bet! My family wrestles with this too! Remember, John is writing this to Christians! Chances are one of these three issues poses a problem for you—pleasure, possessions, or pride. Do you find your identity and worth in your accomplishments? Has the approval of people become more important to us than God's? If so, John warns us that our soul is in danger.

You know the old story of how to boil a frog. You don't put him in a pot of boiling water. If you drop him in the boiling water, he'll jump out before he's injured. So you put him in a pot of cold water, and he's perfectly comfortable. Then you put him on the stove, and little by little the water gets warm. It's very pleasant at first. Then it gets to Jacuzzi level, and he begins to be a little

alarmed. Finally, when it's boiling, it's too late. Christians are just like that, aren't we? We get into the world and it's really nice at first. Then it gets a little warmer and a little warmer. And one day we realize the danger, "This is going to kill me, and I don't have the strength to get out!"²

John reminds us that we do have the strength to get out of the world, to get out of the boiling water in verse 17, "***The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.***" How does a Christian overcome the world? He's already told us to enjoy forgiveness, to grow in our knowledge of the Father, and to be strong in the Word. Here in verse 17 John encourages us with two more things. He first reminds us that the world and its desires are all passing away. That car you can't stop thinking about, the house you can't afford, the pleasure you think will satisfy you—all those things are slowly going the way of the buffalo. The problem with pleasure, possessions and pride is not so much that they are wrong, it's that they're not enough. They don't last. Pleasure is temporary. Possessions lose value. Earthly success is soon forgotten or surpassed. The world was never meant to satisfy us but to make us long for more. These things were meant to point us to God. The things of this world can never satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts. What we really want is not pleasure, but joy. We don't need more stuff, we need contentment. It's not achievement we're after, it's significance. And these things can only be found in relationship with God. This is why John says, "***whoever does the will of God lives forever.***"

What's God's will? We've made understanding God's will so complicated. You don't find God's will through dreams, visions, fleeces, impressions, open doors, random Bible verses or casting lots³. Let me tell you God's will for your life—it's your growth in Christlikeness. A child of God loves Jesus, not the world. A child of God is committed to becoming more like His Son Jesus. God expects us to trust Him and be wise. God's will is for us to become like Him, not the world. When we seek Him in His Word, we are transformed into His likeness. We live forever. And if you think this world has things to enjoy, you can't even imagine what's waiting for us in the life to come! The world says you only live once—Y.O.L.O.—so do what makes you happy. John tells us that's a lie. We were created to live forever. Put your focus there.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

² Donald Hoke, "The Stockholm Syndrome," *Preaching Today*

³ Again, another insight from Kevin DeYoung