

Love for God #4

As Beth was riding in that cab bound for the London ghetto, many thoughts raced through her mind. This would be the last place where you would have expected to find Beth. She had grown up with every advantage that money could buy- a nice home, good social class, the best education, fine clothing, scrumptious food. Why would a girl like this be riding into the city's poorest and most dangerous district alone, in a cab?

Well, there was only one motivation strong enough- that was Beth's love. For kidnappers had taken Beth's love and was holding him for ransom. Beth felt that the risk that she was taking was necessary in order to spare his life. After all, they had said that they would kill him if Beth didn't bring the ransom.

As Beth's cab arrived at the address given to her by the contact, a man whom Beth only knew by the name Taylor, Beth looked around her at the broken windows and run-down buildings. No sooner had the cab stopped, than a gang of men came out and surrounded the cab. All of the dangers that Beth had imagined seemed to be coming into reality. But then, happily, Taylor came to the car door. Beth gave him the money, and Taylor gave to Beth the one she loved so much. The negotiations completed, the gang of men disappeared as quickly as they had come out, and Beth was on her way back home again.

Years later, on a sunny balcony in Italy, Beth would recall that desolate scene in the kidnappers den of East London. She would acknowledge that it had been a most foolish venture of childhood, but it was one at the time that seemed to be demanded by the strength of her love. And Elizabeth Barrett Browning would capture that scene forever in an epic/novel poem that she wrote entitled Aurora Leigh. Yes, Beth was willing to set aside all of her other loves- the fine home in which she was raised, all of her social advantages, her schooling- for that love which she treasured the most at that time, her desire to redeem that one who had been kidnapped, her love for a golden spaniel puppy named Flush.

There are times in life when our love for someone is put to the test. It is at these times that we see something of the exclusive nature of love. For it is impossible to at the same time love someone most dearly and also love that which would bring the loved-one harm. The 2 are incompatible. Loving involves not loving at the same time. To love someone means to not love that which would bring harm.

It certainly should not surprise us then to find commands to not love in the Scriptures as well as commands to love. We are to love the Lord our God with all of our being. We have been looking at the practical nature of this command- specific ways in which the Bible tells us how we can show our love for God.

We have already seen that we demonstrate our love for God:

\*by obeying him, by keeping his commandments.

\*by serving him, by working to build his kingdom here on the earth and by helping other human beings who have been created in his likeness and image.

\*by worshiping him, by seeking after God, by rejoicing in our relationship with him, by exalting his name.

\*Now we come this morning to the matter of showing our love for God by not loving what is opposed to him. Loving by not loving. And God says very clearly in his word that we show our love for him when we choose to not love that which is opposing his character. I would like to look at 2 that the Bible clearly says are not to be loved by followers of God. By not loving these 2, God says that we show our love for Him.

1. The first object of non-love is simply called the world by the Apostle John. Notice is with me.

READ 1 John 2:15-17.

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 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. The world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

Now, at first glance, this couldn't be clearer, could it? The Apostle John simply gives the command to not love the world or anything in the world. And then he tells us that if we love the world, love for God is not in us. In other words, we cannot love God as we should and at the same time be loving the world or anything in the world. Now this appears to be crystal clear. But then some questions come into our minds. What a minute? We can't love anything in the world? Our families are in the world; our wives are in the world. Doesn't the Bible command husbands to love their wives? Isn't it natural to love members of our families? How can we obey the Biblical command to love our wives who are in the world and at the same time obey this command to not love anything in the world? Doesn't the Bible command us to love our neighbors as ourselves? Isn't this even the second part of the greatest commandment? And didn't Jesus command us to even love our enemies? Certainly neighbors and enemies live in the world. And we could give many other examples of legitimate objects of affection that God has created for us in this world. How do we reconcile these in our mind and lives?

Well, the word, *world*, in the New Testament has 3 major meanings. Sometimes it means the physical world- the material world that God has created. God made the world and all things therein, Paul said in Acts 17:24. Other times, *world* means the human world, that is the human race in general. *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.* John 3:16. But there is a third way that the word, *world*, is used in the Bible. *World* sometimes means a set of ideas, or an organized system of thought, a philosophical realm. And, when we think about it,

we actually use the term *world* in this way today. When the T.V. announcer speaks of the world of sports, he is not speaking of another planet. Or when the economist speaks of the world of finance or the politician speaks of the world of politics, they are speaking of a specific set of ideas, an organized system of thought, a specialized realm. It is in this way that the term *world* is used sometimes in the Bible. Jesus called Satan, the *prince of this world* in John 12:31. The devil has an organized system of thought that is opposed to God. Sometimes, the term *world* is used to describe this system in the Bible.

Well, as so often is the case, the context of a passage must help for us to interpret it correctly. And John, after using a very general term- the world- is careful to define that term for us so that we know exactly which meaning of *world* he is talking about here. And his definition lets us know that he is using the term *world* in that 3rd usage. John is not speaking of the physical creation or the human world- we are to appreciate the beauty of God's creation and we are commanded to love people. Notice John's definition of *world* given in verse 16. For everything in this world that I am talking about - specifically, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does.

Now it is not just happenstance that these 3 areas describe the manner in which Lucifer originated sin in the Universe. The Bible indicates that Lucifer was first created the highest of the entire angelic realm. He was given great authority and position. But then, Lucifer craved an even greater position. As he looked at God and saw God's authority over His creation, he envied it. And he boastfully allowed his pride to exalt his mind to the place where he thought that he could take over the position of God himself. *I will ascend to heaven, I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of the assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.* These were his boastful words. It should not surprise us at all that the world system that he has organized and developed is built upon the foundations of these types of sinful cravings, the covetous nature of envying what others have, and the inner, boastful pride of the heart.

If you want to discover what makes the average American tick, a good place to look is the field of advertising. National companies spend countless millions of dollars hiring experts who know what will motivate people to buy their merchandise. And then they spend even more money making commercials and printing advertisements in magazines trying to convince people to buy what they are producing. Enormous amounts of money are spent on these advertisements. A week from today, companies will pay 3 million dollars for a 30 second ad during the Super Bowl. As you look at these advertisements, they reflect the world system in which we are living. They usually either appeal to some craving that we have, or they entice us to covet what we do not have by the beauty or sex appeal of the product, or they appeal to our pride- we will feel so much better or look so much better or people will think so much more highly of us if we use this

product. That is basically the way this world system operates.

Now it is a tremendous temptation for the Christian to begin to adopt this world philosophy, this world system, this worldview that has been authored by the enemy as his own. After all, we live in this world system. It is like we are drifting down a stream, the stream of the world's philosophy. Public education operates within this stream of the world's philosophy, most of the media promotes this world's philosophy, almost every time we hear a news broadcast it is given within this philosophical framework, most businesses operate in this world's philosophy. It is so easy for us to become comfortable with this philosophical system and embrace it ourselves.

For all of us who have ever gone on the canoe trip, we know that it is very easy to drift down with the stream. But just try to paddle the canoe around and head back upstream. It seems to be almost impossible. That's the reason for almost every canoe trip starting upstream and ending downstream. While going down stream it seemed to be quite a bit of work paddling the canoe and keeping it straight. The current of the stream was eventually taken for granted. But the power of that current is seen when one tries to paddle that canoe back upstream again. And that is the way it is in life. We live in this world; we operate in this world's system. It is natural to drift along with this system that often promotes so much that God is opposed to.

\*Jesus taught a life of self denial; the world's system emphasizes assertion, claiming one's rights, competition, it's a dog eat dog world.

\*Jesus taught a life of submission to our creator and contentment with what he gives to us; the world's system emphasizes envy and covetousness, never being satisfied, always wanting more and more.

\*Jesus taught a life of following the will of God, trusting in Him, resting in Him, to exchange our weaknesses for His strengths; the world's system tells us to rely on ourselves, look out for number 1, build ourselves through humanistic self-esteem exercises, realize that we have all the power inside of us without any divine help.

\*Jesus taught us a life of relying on God as our sustainer, as our source of security; the world's system continually tells us to buy a piece of the rock, our security is to be in what has been created, not in the creator.

\*And we could go on and on.

We will drift continuously downstream unless we are consciously battling the current to fight upstream. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul is referring to when, after exhorting us to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God, he adds in Romans 12:2, *and do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world (again, he is speaking of the world's system), but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

We show our love for God by not loving the world. That is, we demonstrate our allegiance to God by

consciously choosing not to operate our lives under this system of thought, the philosophical premises that have been authored by God's enemy, the devil. We demonstrate our allegiance to God by adopting a Biblical worldview and living consistently with it.

2. But there is something else that we are commanded not to love in order to show our love for God that we want to look at this morning. Earlier we said that the world is used in 3 major ways. The physical world, the human world, and the world as a system of thought. It is clear that 1 John 2 and Romans 12 are using the term world in this third way. But now Jesus in Matthew 6 is going to speak of that first way. We show our love for God by not loving what God has created more than God himself.

READ Matthew 6:19-21; 24

MT 6:19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

MT 6:24 "No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.

We all face a continuing temptation. It is a temptation that people have faced ever since the beginning of time. It is the temptation to place our ultimate security in material things. After all, our physical possessions can be seen and felt. They seem to be so much more secure to us naturally than God who cannot be seen and felt. So from the beginning of time, people have had the tendency to put their trust in their possessions.

In Biblical times, security was found in flocks and herds and large families and gold and silver and land. A person who had all of these was thought to be very secure. Today, the nature of security has changed somewhat, but the idea remains pretty much the same. Today, security for most people is found in bank accounts, and annuities and retirement programs and houses and balanced portfolios. And most people in the world today, who are operating under the world's system, are putting their complete confidence in these types of securities- these are what they are loving. For our treasure is put into what we really love according to the words of Jesus.

Now there is nothing inherently wrong with any of these possessions that we have mentioned. God promised Abraham land, and God gave Abraham great material possessions. But Abraham didn't put his trust in them. Rather, Abraham spent his entire life looking for that city whose builder and maker is God according to Hebrews 11.

Now we are living in a very unique but dangerous time and we are being reminded afresh of the fleeting nature of financial wealth. This is where the vacillating stock market and shrinking annuities can actually be a great blessing to us in the long run. Back in the 1930's, our nation went through a time of great depression. It was a horrible time of financial pressure for everyone. One out of every 4 people was out of work – 2 and a half times the number of unemployed in Michigan today. People were lined up for blocks every day just to get a bowl of soup to eat. And it was as if our nation came out of that period of time saying this will never happen to us again. Government programs were instituted to guarantee financial support for the unemployed and retired. Insurance companies sprung up everywhere offering financial security to people. People came to feel that if their financial portfolios were in order, they could have absolute confidence concerning their futures. Like the rich man in the parable that Jesus gave in Luke 12, many Americans became concerned with building more and bigger barns to hold all of their possessions so that they could eat, drink and be merry with complete confidence. But we have now seen in recent days how shaky that foundation was. As major banks and financial institutions and huge companies have declared bankruptcy, we have been seeing the shaky nature of putting our trust and confidence in these institutions that have been built upon sand.

We shouldn't be surprised. God's assessment of such a philosophy has not changed in the past 2,000 years. Just as he appraised that man rich in worldly possessions to be a fool in Luke 12, so he looks down today on our foolishness as we put our love into money for ultimate financial security. For a financial portfolio cannot bring ultimate security and safety. And even if it could, putting our ultimate confidence in money does not prepare us for our eternal state.

We are in the midst of a time when we are seeing the cracks in the foundation of this false trust in the world's economic system widening and crumbling before our very eyes. Today, economic experts agree that this world's financial system is in serious trouble, far more serious than most realize. This shouldn't surprise us for there have been courageous prophets who have been warning us for years. Two decades ago, Larry Burkett, a Christian financial advisor, wrote of a coming financial collapse that could not be avoided. Over 30 cents out of every dollar that we give in taxes today goes to pay for the interest of the federal debt- and that figure is mushrooming every day, with every new bailout.

Now there is nothing inherently wrong with having money. We all need money to live. Money pays for our food and mortgages. Money puts clothing on our backs and gas in our cars. The Bible tells us that God delights in giving good gifts to his people and that we are to receive and enjoy these gifts with thanksgiving from his hand.

But if we come to the place where we are putting our ultimate faith and confidence in our bank

account, we are building our lives on a very shaky foundation. People who place their love in money are not preparing themselves for a stable future. Would Job have been prepared for his losses without his faith and trust in God?

Jesus used a very humble illustration to conclude his famous Sermon on the Mount. After advising his followers to not store up all of their treasures here on the earth and to not love money over God, he said these words:

*MT 7:24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup> But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."*

I believe that these recent storms that have hit our financial institutions can be great blessings in disguise for each of us – I know that they have been a blessing in my own life. For these storms have revealed the sandy foundations of so many of these institutions that we were assuming to be so rock solid. They told us we were buying a piece of the rock, but we found out that we had purchased a small part of some sand dune. The the crumbling structures all around us force us to examine where we are really putting our treasures. Where is the ultimate love of our life? Is it our bank account or is it God? Are we loving God with all of our being or is our secret mistress really money?

One of the very practical and tangible ways in which we show our love for God is found in what we do not love. As we consciously choose not to love and follow the world's system of thought, we are showing our love for God. And as we choose not to place our love and security in money, material possessions, we are showing our love for God himself.

The Apostle John said it best: *The world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God lives forever.* The only secure place for our love is in God himself. For whatever happens here on the earth, our relationship with Him is changeless, and he has promised to meet the needs of his own. And Jesus has promised that right now he is preparing a place for those who love him so that they might live with him for all eternity.