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Incompatible Loves

1 John 2.15-17

Series: Blessed Assurance (Communion Series)

The Village Church

July 7, 2024

I. Introduction

A. I have a confession to make

1. Here it is: I like to watch *Law and Order*
 - a. And I prefer the original over the spin-offs
 - b. The original version ran for about 20 years from 1990-2010
 - c. Those first 20 years were my favorite
2. And I have watched it for years
 - a. All the way back when Chris Noth played Mike Logan, and Jerry Orbach was Lennie Briscoe
 - b. And S. Epatha Merkerson as Lt. Van Buren, and Steven Hill as the irascible Adam Schiff as the DA
 - c. And I loved (have to be careful today how I use that word) Fred Thompson as the DA and Sam Waterson as Jack McCoy
3. Even today, I will occasionally watch the reruns
 - a. And almost all the time when I watch the reruns I'm watching an episode I've seen before – sometimes multiple times
 - b. So I've probably seen them all – at least from those first 20 years
4. So that's my confession
 - a. That's not an endorsement – that's a confession

B. Now you can argue about whether that's the best use of my entertainment time

1. Or whether it accurately portrays our criminal legal system
 - a. I even used to watch it with my Dad when he was with us
 - b. I figured if a hardened career police officer would watch it, it couldn't be too crazy
 - c. (Then again, he did like to watch Columbo...)
2. Or you can either question whether there are any redeeming moral qualities in it
 - a. Remember – this is a confession

C. But there is one motive that I hear in those old episodes from time to time

1. One motive that is exposed in the climax of a cross-examination
 - a. Cross-examination of the murderer on trial
 - b. A murderer of a loved one – even a husband or a wife
2. And Jack McCoy relentlessly presses the evidence, bringing the perpetrator to a place of tears
3. And the murderer pleads with him, “But you have to believe me – I *loved* him!”

4. To which McCoy would reply, "Yes, but you loved yourself more."
5. "I'm finished with this witness."
- D. The issue ultimately devolves into a matter of loves
 1. Loves which are incompatible
 2. Loves which are necessarily in conflict
 3. And when the wrong love prevails, the crime of passion is the result
- E. Ultimately, biblical religion – both Old Testament Judaism and New Testament Christianity – comes down to a matter of competing loves
- F. **Exodus 34:14** (ESV) —
 1. 14 (for you shall worship no other god,
 2. for the LORD, whose name is Jealous,
 3. is a jealous God)...
- G. **Matthew 6:24** (ESV) —
 1. 24 "No one can serve two masters,
 2. for either he will hate the one and love the other,
 3. or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
 4. You cannot serve God and money."
- H. God is a jealous God
 1. And He will broker no competitor in the arena of love
 2. At least in the arena of supreme affections
- I. God is the only being in the universe for whom supreme affections must be reserved
 1. His name is to be regarded as holy
 - a. Supreme love is to be reserved for God alone
 2. **Exodus 20:3** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 "You shall have no other gods before me."
 3. And our love for God is not only reserved only for Him
 - a. It is to be fully embraced by our every human faculty
 4. **Deuteronomy 6:5** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.
 5. God's concern for His own glory is to be our chief concern
 6. **Isaiah 48:11** (ESV) —
 - a. 11 For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it,
 - b. for how should my name be profaned?
 - c. My glory I will not give to another.
 7. God is a jealous God
 - a. He demands to be the chief object of our affections
- J. The supremacy of love for God is the overriding concern of our text
 1. And the ultimate test of the fidelity of our relationship with God
 - a. And the final arbiter of the assurance of our salvation
- K. **1 John 2:15–17** (ESV) —
 1. 15 Do not love the world or the things in the world.
 2. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

3. 16 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.
4. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires,
5. but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

II. The World, the World, and the World

- A. The first thing we need to consider in unpacking a text like that is to define a key term
 1. And that term is the word “world”
 2. “World” is a key term in this text because of its frequency
 - a. It occurs six times in just three verses
 3. And if you removed the word “world” from the text, the text would be meaningless
- B. But we need to define the word “world” because, like many of our English words, the same word can mean very different things depending on the context
 1. And even in John’s writings – in his gospel and epistles and even in the Revelation – John uses the word in different ways
- C. World – kosmos (Gk)
 1. In this epistle John has only used the word once at the beginning of Chapter 2
 - a. 1 John 2:2 (ESV) — 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.
 2. But then, in these three verses, he uses it six times in a very different way
 - a. And he will use it again and again through the remainder of the epistle
- D. The basic Greek meaning of the word “kosmos” is “the universe”, or to narrow the meaning a bit, “the earth” or this planet
 1. Early Greek origin of the word reflected the idea of an “ornament”
 - a. In which the universe, or our planet, was an ornament of God
 2. In fact, we get our word “cosmetic” from the Gk kosmos
 3. So kosmos came to mean that which is well ordered or even beautiful
- E. Eventually, the world kosmos came to mean the world of humanity
 1. And John used it this way famously
 2. John 3:16 (ESV) —
 - a. 16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
 3. So God loved the world of humanity
 4. John 3:17 (ESV) —
 - a. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.
 5. That’s the sense that we find in the verse earlier in Chapter 2 that I mentioned earlier
 6. 1 John 2:2 (ESV) —
 - a. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

7. **John 4:42** (ESV) —
 - a. 42 They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”
8. **1 John 4:14** (ESV) —
 - a. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.
9. None of those occasions carry moral overtones
 - a. Except to imply that humanity needs a savior
- F. But the most important and common use of kosmos in John’s writings carry powerful moral overtones
 1. By that we mean that the world in this usage is evil and antagonistic to God
 - a. It reflects the world of humanity, but humanity in rebellion against God
 - b. It is the anti-God system of opposition
 2. And because it is the anti-God system of opposition, it not only reflects the world of unredeemed humanity
 - a. But also of the Devil himself
 3. **1 John 5:19** (ESV) —
 - a. 19 We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.
 4. **1 John 3:1** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.
 - b. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.
 5. That, of course, is an echo of what John said in his gospel
 6. **John 1:10** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.
 7. And this morally subversive meaning implies and antagonism, not only toward God, but also toward His children
 8. **John 15:18–21** (ESV) —
 - a. 18 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.
 - b. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own;
 - c. but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
 - d. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’
 - e. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.
 - f. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.
 - g. 21 But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

9. **John 17:14** (ESV) —
 - a. 14 I have given them your word,
 - b. and the world has hated them because they are not of the world,
 - c. just as I am not of the world.
- G. Now each of these meanings should evoke very different responses on behalf of the people of God
 1. In the first meaning – that of the universe – we should thank God for it
 - a. The world in this sense is a wonderful gift of God
 - b. And gift that is meant to be enjoyed
 - c. As we look around us at the beauty that is spread before us as a painting on a canvas, we should give God glory and thank Him for this world that we enjoy!
 2. In the second meaning – that of the sphere of humanity – we should focus our attention on evangelizing the world
 - a. That even as God “so loved the world”, so should we!
 - b. That as God and Jesus called us to love our neighbors as ourselves, we are loving the world in this sense
 3. But in the third meaning – the moral sense of the anti-God system of opposition, our response is to be very different indeed
 - a. We are stand in opposition to the world and its anti-God values
 - b. The world in this reflects values of destruction, values of dehumanization, values which are, in the final analysis, Satanic

III. **The Forbidden Affection**

- A. The first thing we see in this text is that affection for the world in this sense is a forbidden affection
 1. We are not to love the world
 - a. Or the things in the world
- B. **1 John 2:15** (ESV) —
 1. 15 **Do not love the world or the things in the world...**
- C. Of course, when John expresses it this way, he’s not so much talking about behavior as about attitudes and dispositions
 1. “Do not love...” is his admonition
 2. And when he speaks about “or the things in the world” he’s not talking about material things per se
 - a. But about the attitudes and values of the world
- D. God knows we need materials things
 1. **Matthew 6:31–32** (ESV) —
 - a. 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’
 - b. 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.
 2. Instead...
 3. **Matthew 6:33** (ESV) —

- a. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
- E. And in the final analysis, you can be just as materialistic when you're scraping to make a living as when you trying to amass an abundance of wealth!
 1. Each of those worldly attitudes will send you to hell just as fast as the other
- F. No, we're talking about the values of the world
 1. The anti-God values
 - a. In which the values of God are demeaned, undermined, or ignored
 - b. And the kinds of values which destroys life as God intended are exalted in their place
- G. Boice: John is actually thinking of selfish ambition, pride, the love of success or flattery, and other such characteristics
 1. In reference to our study of Romans, these are the attitudes of the flesh, our sinful natures
- H. Perhaps the best synopsis of these anti-God attitudes are those that Paul expresses in Galatians
 1. **Galatians 5:19–21** (ESV) —
 - a. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,
 - b. 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,
 - c. 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.
 - d. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- I. So, John likewise says, "Don't love that stuff!"
 1. Of course, we could add to that list – and the NT contains other similar lists
 2. **1 Corinthians 6:9–10** (ESV) —
 - a. 9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?
 - b. Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,
 - c. 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.
- J. Even more importantly, since John speaks of what not to love, we're to understand that to mean the underlying attitudes that feed those kinds of behavior
- K. Remember what Jesus does with the Law of God
 1. There is the mistaken notion that the OT is the harsh, vindictive, unyielding standard of righteousness
 - a. But that when Jesus came along, all of a sudden a softer and gentler God showed up
 - b. And He let a lot of things pass
 2. But remember the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5-7**)
 3. "You've heard that it was said..."

- a. And then He gave one of the commandments
- 4. “But now I tell you...”
 - a. And then He elaborated on it’s meaning
- 5. “You have heard that it was said... ‘you shall not murder’...
 - a. “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment...”
- 6. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’...
 - a. “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
- L. In other words, Jesus takes the Law of God
 - 1. And He doesn’t diminish it, or downplays it
 - a. He actually intensifies its demands
 - b. And He drives the implications inward
 - c. Inward to our desires and attitudes
- M. So...
 - 1. **1 John 2:15** (ESV) —
 - a. 15 **Do not love the world or the things in the world....**

IV. **The Incompatible Affection**

- A. Well, why is this important?
 - 1. What does this have to do with the assurance of salvation?
 - a. Which is what this communion series is all about
- B. **1 John 2:15** (ESV) —
 - 1. 15 Do not love the world or the things in the world.
 - 2. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
- C. So here we have an assessment of sorts
 - 1. Do we have a relationship with the Father?
 - a. Are we really, truly His child?
 - 2. If we love the world and the things in the world – the anti-God attitudes and dispositions of the opposition to God
 - a. The love of the Father is not in us!
- D. You cannot love the Father and love the world, in this sense, or the values and attitudes that characterize the world
 - 1. They are incompatible loves
- E. There are many things in this world, and in life, that are incompatible
 - 1. You can’t be in two places at the same time
 - 2. You can’t lie in bed and take a walk at the same time
 - 3. You really can’t even listen and talk at the same time
 - a. Although many people seem to think they can!
 - 4. They are all incompatible
- F. But the most important thing about the Christian life is that you can’t love God and love the world at the same time
 - 1. They are incompatible loves
- G. Perhaps Jesus expressed it best
 - 1. **Matthew 6:24** (ESV) —

- a. 24 “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other,
 - b. or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
 - c. You cannot serve God and money.
 - H. Our love for God is expressed by Jesus in terms of service
 - 1. To love God is to serve God
 - a. To love money more than God is to serve money!
 - b. To let money control you
 - c. To let money call the shots, and prioritize your lives
 - I. So the first reason we are not to love the world or the things in the world is because you can’t have incompatible affections
 - 1. You can’t love God and the world at the same time
- V. **The World’s Foils**
 - A. Well, John goes further
 - 1. While Paul has his lists, John expresses the “things in the world” in terms of three foils
 - a. Three ways the world entices us away from our affections for God
 - b. And to succumb to these three foils is to block our sense of security in Christ
 - c. To diminish our sense of assurance of salvation
 - B. **1 John 2:16** (ESV) —
 - 1. 16 For all that is in the world—
 - 2. the desires of the flesh
 - 3. and the desires of the eyes
 - 4. and pride of life—
 - 5. is not from the Father but is from the world.
 - C. And since John is here highlighting incompatible loves
 - 1. His descriptors are all internal
 - a. All dimensions of our private worlds
 - 2. But they are elements of our private worlds that eventually make their way into our behavior and conduct
 - D. **The Desires of the Flesh**
 - 1. The word “flesh” or sarx (Gk), as we have seen from our study of Romans, can be understood in a number of ways
 - a. But here John uses it, not in the sense of humanity in general, or of the parts of our bodies
 - b. He uses it, as Paul does in much of his epistles, in a moral sense
 - 2. Flesh is that residue of sin that remains in the life of the believer
 - a. The sinful nature with which we believers struggle in our walk with Christ
 - 3. So when John identifies “the desires of the flesh” as that which is “in the world” you might get the idea that he’s talking about the grosser sins
 - a. And perhaps sexual sins come immediately to mind
 - 4. But John has something broader in mind (as does Paul)

- a. He has in mind any inward disposition and impulse which is antagonistic to the character of God
 - b. And antagonistic to the Law of God
- 5. Barclay: It is to live a life which is dominated by the sense. It is to be gluttonous in food... slavish in pleasure; lustful and lax in morals; selfish in the use of possessions; regardless of all the spiritual values; extravagant in the gratification of worldly, earthly and material desires. The flesh's desire is forgetful of, blind to, or regardless of the commandments of God.
- 6. Certainly the grosser sins are included in "the desires of the flesh"
 - a. But so are selfish things like gossip, or insensitivity to the needs of others, slothful in the spiritual disciplines

E. **The Desires of the Eyes**

- 1. The second element John uses to describe "things in the world" is "the desires of the eyes"
 - a. And what comes immediately to mind is the matter of appearances
- 2. It is largely through the eyes that the world makes its greatest impressions
 - a. Media is the watchword of the day
 - b. We are bombarded by the world's values in terms of appearances
- 3. And of course, it's not just what hits us in the face in the checkout line in the supermarket
 - a. It's everything that plague us through the internet and social media
- 4. Search for a product on line, and somehow you'll begin to get advertising about similar products in your emails and in any foray into social media or internet search engines
 - a. It's almost inescapable
- 5. And in every case, the advertising is designed to create desires in you that you never knew you had!
 - a. You're surprised how much stuff you really need to be happy!
 - b. How could you possibly live without all that stuff!
- 6. And for young people it's even more dangerous
 - a. The ideals of the world expressed in social media is creating the most psychologically dysfunctional generation in history
 - b. As so much of the posts are designed to reflect well being and success to which no one can really ever measure up
 - c. So that depression and anxiety, even suicidal ideation, is the ultimate result among young people
 - d. So much of that is causing the sexual dysphoria which is behind the medical child-abuse taking place in the push toward medical and surgical sexual transition
 - e. That's all part of "the desire of the eyes"
- 7. But it goes beyond the media
 - a. The desires of the eyes also have to do with one's personal reputation and position in the world
 - b. The keeping up with the Joneses syndrome (my apologies to any actual Joneses out there!)

8. How much do we care for that which enters our minds through visual media?
 - a. Or how much do we obsess with how we stack up to others in the world's economy?
9. The desires of the eyes belong to the world
 - a. And we must fall out of love with those things
- F. **The Pride of Life**
 1. Finally, John includes "the pride of life" in his identifiers for what constitutes the "things in the world"
 2. Pride is perhaps the most difficult one to define, but also the one that the Bible rails against the most, pretty much from beginning to end
 3. There is a fine line between pursuing excellence in whatever enterprise God has given you and for which He has gifted you
 - a. And beginning to think that you've accomplished it yourself
 - b. And that you've excelled to a level of superiority that surpasses your compadres
 4. **1 Corinthians 4:7** (ESV) —
 - a. 7 For who sees anything different in you?
 - b. What do you have that you did not receive?
 - c. If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?
 5. Remember the classic examples in the Bible
 - a. Nebuchadnezzar (**Daniel 4**) – who claimed credit for Babylon's glory and greatness
 - b. Whereupon God afflicted him with mental illness
 - c. Sent him out into the wilderness, eating grass like an ox
 - d. Plunging into a crisis of personal hygiene that has become the stuff of artistic expression over the centuries
 - e. Hair as long as eagles feathers, and unwashed at that
 - f. And nails like bird's claws
 - g. Until, through his humiliation, he repented and gave glory to God alone!
 6. But perhaps Satan is the quintessential example
 7. **Isaiah 14:12–14** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!
 - b. How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!
 - c. 13 You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high;
 - d. I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north;
 - e. 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
 - f. I will make myself like the Most High.'
 8. Of course, his end was worse than Nebuchadnezzar
 9. **Isaiah 14:19** (ESV) —
 - a. 19 but you are cast out, away from your grave,

- b. like a loathed branch, clothed with the slain,
 - c. those pierced by the sword,
 - d. who go down to the stones of the pit,
 - e. like a dead body trampled underfoot.
- 10. But the world wants you to think of yourself as above all that
 - a. The world says you must look out for Number 1!
 - b. And you, of course, are Number 1
- 11. The Bible's message is in stark contrast to those values
- 12. **Psalm 25:9** (ESV) —
 - a. 9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.
- 13. **Psalm 34:2** (ESV) —
 - a. 2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
 - b. let the humble hear and be glad.
- 14. **James 4:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 ... Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
- 15. **James 4:10** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord,
 - b. and he will exalt you.
- G. Those are "things in the world"
 - 1. They represent the world's values
 - a. The anti-God values
 - 2. The desires of the flesh
 - a. The desires of the eyes
 - b. The pride of life
- H. Are you in love with those things?

VI. **The Incompatible Destiny**

- A. The final reason we are not to love the world or the things in the world is that they represent an incompatible destiny
- B. **1 John 2:17** (ESV) —
 - 1. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires,
 - 2. but whoever does the will of God abides forever.
- C. And this is the truth that ought to grab your heart and compel you to follow Jesus more closely than ever
 - 1. The knowledge that all the enticements of the world are destined for destruction
 - a. All the idols of the world will be dissolved and sent to the abyss of history
 - 2. **Hosea 8:4** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 They made kings, but not through me.
 - b. They set up princes, but I knew it not.
 - c. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction.

- 3. The world has made its idols
 - a. But they are made in order to be destroyed
- D. What, then, abides?
 - 1. What lasts?
 - a. What is carried into eternity?
- E. Well, “whoever does the will of God abides forever.”
 - 1. If you’re a believer in Jesus
 - a. One who is a new creature in Christ
 - b. One who is devoted to fostering a true love relationship with God through His Son Jesus
 - 2. If you cast yourself on His mercy
 - a. And cast yourself into the arms of His Holy Spirit
 - b. Who will find the indwelling Spirit giving you the capacity – which you don’t have in your flesh – to follow the will of God
 - 3. You! You will abide forever!

VII. Conclusion

- A. So, what do you really love?
 - 1. Or whom do you really love?
 - 2. With an incomparable love?
- B. Jesus, when he restored Peter after his denial, placed the question this way:
- C. **John 21:15** (ESV) —
 - 1. 15 ... “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”
- D. Scholars debate what Jesus’ meant by “these”
 - 1. More than these other disciples?
 - 2. More than the fish they were enjoying for breakfast?
- E. In the final analysis, it doesn’t really matter
 - 1. Do you love Jesus more than... anything else?
- F. That’s the question I need to consider every day
 - 1. Do I love Jesus?
 - a. Yes, I say with Peter, “You know I love you, Jesus”
 - 2. Do I love Jesus enough?
 - a. No; I don’t love Jesus the way I ought to love Him
 - b. For He deserves to receive my complete adoration and worship
 - c. And I confess I fall way short
 - 3. But, Do I have Jesus more than anything else?
 - a. Do I love Jesus more than the world or the things in the world?