

INTRODUCTION

Rivalries is a fun part of sports. A team may have one or more perpetual enemies. There is a true and fascinating story about the 1999 Oklahoma Sooners and Texas Longhorns football game. The two schools are long-time rivals. That year Oklahoma had a new head coach, and the school was the underdog for the contest. Its offensive coordinator cooked up a sneaky trick. He put together a fake chart that contained a few offensive plays. He asked a player to drop the sheet of paper near the coaches of the opponent minutes before the game began. “This can’t be real?” The Texas defensive coordinator wondered. But he fell for the scam anyhow. He modified his defensive scheme because he expected Oklahoma to run certain plays. Of course, they did not. Instead, the Sooners took advantage of the weakness of the Longhorns and scored. Just ten minutes into the game Texas was already behind 0-17. Finally, the coach threw the bogus script into the trash can. Texas went back to its original game plan and managed to win the game. Rivals will use any means to outsmart each other. The Bible tells us that Christians are in constant conflict with our spiritual enemy too. Satan attempts to overwhelm us in every way. God never sends us to a playground, but to a battleground. Therefore, the apostle John told us that although Christians live in the world, they should not live for the world. You may notice the opposing themes in the three verses we just read – love the world versus love the Father, things that come from the world versus things come from the Father and transitional versus eternal life. In John’s writing, he loved to use contrasting ideas to reflect that God is absolute. There is no gray area in God. To Him, things are either right or wrong. As we go through our daily life, we are either drawn closer to God or pulled away from Him. No one can stay neutral.

EXPLANATION

1. Devotion 效忠的對象

Let us consider three words based on this passage. The first word I would like for you to pay attention to is “devotion.” John said in **verse 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. John told us that loving the world is incompatible with loving the Heavenly Father. John said that a person can either devote his/her heart to the Father or to the world. The Greek word for “world” is “*kosmos*,” from which we derive cosmos (the universe) and cosmopolitan (meaning multicultural). John used “world” 23 times in this letter. It can mean one of three things: the physical world (e.g., 1 John 4:9), the mankind (e.g., 4:14) or the fallen world (e.g., 5:4). Here, John is talking about the third usage for the term. If we love what this sinful world can offer, then we will not be able to love God at the same time. If we analyze the grammar of the Greek text, when John said “do not love the world” he meant we have to “stop the habit of loving the world.” It is like when a person decides to quit gambling or quit eating junk food, he makes up his mind to never touch the thing again. The question is: how do we define “love” for the world? We still live in the world. Most of us have a day job. We surf the internet and we have our hobbies. Those of you who are in a dating relationship can tell us what “love” is. If you are married you may have to recall your memory.

When you are in love, your heart is completely devoted to your lover. You think of the person during the day and even in your dream. When both of you spend time together in a park or a restaurant you wish that time could be frozen. That is love! Besides a person, people may love their career, pet, TV drama or sports. What John described is an intense emotion toward that something or someone we cannot live without. In **Matthew 6:24** Jesus talked about the love for money – “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.” You willingly serve whatever or whomever you love. It was the year 2000 when I bought my first new car. I even spent money to install an anti-theft alarm in it. At that time, my wife and I were living in an apartment. From the windows on the third floor I could stare at my car often. My heart was filled with pride. One time when my wife got out of the car, she bumped the door against something. Of course, I was not happy about it. She warned me: “God will teach you a good lesson if you worship your car!” She must have the gift of prophecy. Before long, there was another bump, ding and scratch. I finally realized that it was only a machine on four wheels. God blessed me so that I could bless others by giving people rides. Brothers and sisters: what or whom do you devote yourself to? Here is a simple test: if God takes that thing or person away will you still love the Lord? It is a matter of priority and value. I admire a few business owners among us who close their stores on Sunday morning to worship with us. They love God more than money. I also appreciate people who use their personal vacation days for ministries. Every year during the Student Life Camp in July a few brothers and sisters volunteer to drive young people to and from the camp. They serve as mentors too. Also, there are some retirees among us who work faithfully in various ministries. They could have used their free time to travel around the world, play golf or baby-sit their grandkids, though there is nothing wrong about all those activities. They love the Lord and this church. I do not think any Christian would say that he/she does not love God. But do we love God enough to sacrifice ourselves for Him?

2. Desire 追求的目標

John reminded us that God should be the object of our devotion. The next word we will consider is “desire.” We need to ask ourselves what the desire of our hearts is. John said in **verse 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. John outlined three category of things this fallen world can offer. First, it is something that makes us feel good. We can think of food to eat, clothes to wear and entertainment we can participate. Second, it is something that is pleasant to look at. When you enter a store like Costco, the first thing that catches your attention are those big screen TV with stunning colors. The message is clear: Take one home! The cosmetic industry invests millions of dollars to make our faces, hair and body look good. Besides something that makes us feel good and look good, thirdly, there are also things that we can brag about ourselves. The world lures us to buy the stuffs we do not need, with the money we do not have and to impress the people we do not know. Unfortunately, the result is: they do not care! Don’t get me wrong. Things like new technology make our life more convenient and help us save time. The danger is that all those three areas can easily become the center of our lives, thus taking away our desire for God. In doing so, we are sending a wrong message: “Look at me! I am special because I have all these stuffs.” From this verse, we can derive the fifth proof to verify that we are Christians. Believers are those who **love the Father and not the world**. If you think about it, any form of sin actually belongs to one of those three

categories. In fact, that was why Adam and Eve fell. Let us revisit **Genesis 3:6** - When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. The verse explained why Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fruit was “good for food” – making Adam and Eve feel good. The fruit was “pleasing to the eye” – it looked good. It was also “desirable for gaining wisdom” – Adam and Eve could brag about how smart they were. We always wonder why gaining wisdom is wrong. Does God want us to be dumb? We can look at the previous verse to understand what kind of wisdom it was talking about. **Verse 5**: “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Satan misled Adam and Eve into thinking that they could create their own standard of right versus wrong. For example, who can condemn me that lying is sin when I can make a lot of money by making up stories? Who dare to say that cheating in an exam is wrong when I can get an A? The result justifies the means. We want to be our own God. Brothers and sisters: that is why this lie is so subtle. The world always competes for our desire toward God. We can honestly ask ourselves if we are craving more about stuffs or craving more about God. We need take a good look at our schedule and see how much time we spend on the things of this world. You may need some adjustment if you have time to exercise or do your hair, but do not have time to read the Bible and attend church meetings. There is a major difference between entertainment and addiction. If you finish your tasks then play games or check social media then it is called entertainment. But if you cannot let go of your electronic gadgets and ignore your duties then it is called addiction. Do you crave after people’s compliments on how good you look on the outside and how impressive your resume appears? Or do people praise you because they know that you are a Christian and they can see your humility, honesty and kindness toward others? The difference is, do we want people to fix their eyes on us, or do we want them to see God living in us?

3. Destiny 終極的結果

John told us that God should be the object of our devotion and the desire of our hearts. The third word we need to consider is “destiny.” Look at **verse 17**: The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. We know that our earthly life will eventually come to an end. The Bible tells us that even the world will also have a termination point when Jesus returns. However, the world keeps fooling us into partying as if there were no future. The world tells us: “Don’t worry about tomorrow. Enjoy today!” Health products, new diets and exercise gadgets all attempt to extend our lives. Do not get me wrong, we should take care of our physical body. We cannot serve God effectively if we do not have good health. But the world is trying to build a heaven on earth. We think that we always have a long time to enjoy life. Jesus once told a parable about a wealthy landlord. He had a big harvest to a degree that he ran out of space to store his grains. He decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. He smiled from his heart, thinking that he had many years to eat, drink and be merry. In **Luke 12:20** there was a voice from heaven: “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’” The Bible is very realistic. I wish every person can live till at least 100-year-old. But the fact is, we do not have full control of our circumstances. I have much confidence in my own driving. But for a city like Memphis, you cannot put too much trust in some crazy drivers! There was a story about Satan gathering his little devils for a meeting. He wanted some input on how to fool humans.

Someone suggested: “We can tell people that there is no heaven.” The chief responded: “Bad idea. Everyone wants to go to heaven.” Another devil proposed: “We will tell them that there is no hell.” Satan commented: “Thanks to the horror movies, people know hell is real.” Then a third evil spirit said: “We tell people that there is no need to hurry.” Since then we have been deceived into thinking that we do not need to make up our mind to accept Jesus today. The world also keeps coming up with new ideas to make us busy and entertained. Soon after Christmas, the stores will display merchandises for Valentine’s Day, then Easter and so on. Businessmen make up excuses for their promotion. But what does Presidents’ Day or Veterans’ Day have to do with sales? When the football season is over, sport fans will turn their focus to basketball, then comes baseball. TV dramas and movies have sequels after sequels. However, people still get bored easily. Nothing can give us long-lasting fulfillment because nothing lasts forever. Only what belongs to God will last forever. When we accepted Jesus into our hearts, we received eternal life. Even many Christians mistakenly believe that eternal life begins after they leave this world. No wonder why so many believers care very little about spiritual matter. They think that they can relax in this life because their eternal destiny has been set. But the Bible clearly tells us that our eternal life begins the moment we accepted Christ. The Holy Spirit came into our hearts to change us. From then on, we develop interest in reading God’s Word, come to church meetings and love our brothers and sisters. Those are signs of our new life. We have to live this life with an eternal perspective. We always have to ask ourselves whether what we do has any eternal value. Students should strive for good grades. They should study hard not only to please their parents, but also to please God. They can witness to their classmates in school. They can set their goal to be the best engineer or accountant to infuse Biblical values in their profession. Parents should raise their children using God’s principles. When our kids grow up, they can display godly virtues in their circle of influence. Henceforth, one generation will impact the next in positive ways.

CONCLUSION

In this passage we learn that although Christians live in the world, they should not live for the world. If we truly know that we are only passing through this earth we can feel at ease at any loss or gain. When we have plenty, we give thanks to God. When we only have limited resources, we can also give thanks to God. Ultimately, the Lord is asking us: do we love Him more, or do we love the world more? In closing, there are a few questions we can ask ourselves. Can we enjoy something without being enslaved by it? If the Lord asks us to drop it can we let it go freely without any regret? Are we grateful to God for what He gives us without feeling greedy for more? Do we realize that God blesses us first because He intends to use us to bless others? Are our eyes fixed on what is eternal, instead of external? Anything that does not last forever is dispensable. Finally, do we focus on the product or process? We may be thrilled by temporary excitement, but everything we do should point to the final goal of giving glory to God.