

“This Is Life”: Living Discriminately
10.28.18
1 John 2:15-29



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

“What was your reaction to John’s statement: “Do not love the world or the things in the world”? Doesn’t that seem to contradict Jesus’ declaration in John 3 about his love for the world? How do you understand (by today’s teaching and your own study) the ‘world’, as John offers it?”

“Why are ‘love of the Father’ and ‘love of the world’ mutually-exclusive? How does loving the world prevent us from loving the Father? How do you think loving the Father allows us to rightly love our world?”

“How would you describe what John means by “the lust of the flesh”, “the lust of the eyes”, and “the pride of life”? How do you think that the “world of entertainment” or the “world of economics”, appeals to those specific temptations?”

“Where, in your life, do you feel the gravitational pull of your flesh? Could you identify at least one way in which you are attempting to satisfy a legitimate, God-designed desire, in self-indulgent, and self-reliant ways?”

“How have you normalized the lie? How is our current culture reinforcing and supporting your present approach?”

“What is the lie that you are believing about God? About yourself? About what constitutes the ‘good life’? What is the truth that God is asking you to believe?” (listening prayer, invitation of the Spirit, scripture, trusted friends)

Teaching Notes...

In his brief letter, John's **first** priority is to give witness to his own full-on, sensory experience of God (as offered to us, "absolutely", in the person of Jesus) in such a way that we would become convinced that there are no limits to his good intentions for us and his determination to carry them out.

The **second** priority is for us is to re-order our lives so as to nourish the new creation; to intentionally interrupt old practices and ways of life that cannot produce the new life that God desires and has made possible for us.

What is apparent in our world:

There is a general sense that "something's not right". Things are not as they should be [the biblical narrative has a robust word for it, although our culture would be hesitant to define it so: "**evil**"--- literally, "*not as it ought to be*".

There is a lack of agreement about how to define it or explain it [it's difficult to dialogue civilly about it]

There is no consensus as to how to address it. For some, the answer is "**political reform**": the right candidate. For others, the answer is "**legislative reform**": "*Let's make policy which outlaws human foolishness!*" Others clamor for "**economic reform**": let's redistribute the wealth, which will, in turn, eliminate greed and enhance generosity.

Some would go so far as to say that the structures and systems themselves have become so corrupt that "anarchy" is the only logical course of action. "Clean slate". It seems to me that we have seen that project back-fire in "biblical-proportions" somewhere around Genesis 9 and following with a guy named Noah.

The Biblical-worldview (our story) fixes us firmly in the context of a conflict of Kingdoms.

The narrative suggests that there is something wrong with the world that is far greater than the laundry list of behaviors that we label as "sins". The theme of the entire Story is that the whole of creation is currently not experiencing its "former glory": it's not what it used to be.

For centuries, apprentices of Jesus have spoken and written about the "*three enemies of the soul*", which have all but been excused from the discussion: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

First of all, let me say that biblical literature communicates in ways that are vastly different from our late-modern understanding. The text is offered as a series of characters, imagery, symbolism, poems, history and song that develop themes to be explored. The bible is meditation literature which is not designed to offer clarity on its first reading. It is offered as an invitation into further pursuit. We must "search" it. We must "seek" it.

For instance, from Genesis 3, there's a tale of "*two seeds*"; two "lineages" which reproduce either life or death. One traces its lineage back to "The Satan", the progenitor

or Father of lies, the other traces itself back to Christ, the divine seed, which will deal with the real problem, at its root: sin. He will be surrendered, obedient, responsive, restorative, etc. in ways that proves ultimately defeating.

“The words most often associated with Satan’s intentions?” “destruction” and “death” (John 10:10)

“A summation of Jesus’ mission?” “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8)

Messianic theme as mosaic: woven throughout the narrative and each prophet/author seems to offer a piece or portion of the reality (e.g. we need a new human, a new Moses, a new David, an ultimate Passover sacrifice, a better priest)

In Matthew 1, God is taking back his rule, through the merging of the divine and human. The “*son of man*” [Daniel and the gospels]. It is clear to Jesus that the real enemy is not the Jewish leaders, it is not the Roman presence. Those people are simply cooperating with the evil that needs to be defeated. He walks into a village, and spiritual evil expresses its discontent with his presence.

The NT authors offer the (3) great opponents of living well as “**the world**”, “**the flesh**” and “**the devil**”. They are themes that have dropped out of our modern conversation and have been relegated to ancient, superstitious religious theories.

The world... (the evil around us) 1 John 2:15-17, 4:1-6)

The word is used often to describe the cosmos (created order). It is also used to speak of humanity, in general. Most often John uses it to describe system(s) of thought which, with some intentionality and determination, dismiss the notion of God, or at least the idea of a Creator-God to whom we are ultimately responsible.

“Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.” Edwards Deming

So, we refer to the “*world of politics*”, or the “*world of economics*”, or the “*world of entertainment*”. It suggests an environment; an atmosphere which is reinforced by commonly-held assumptions which they hope to purport and gain influence.

These systems are not simply *in competition with*, but *in opposition to*, God. “*Love of the Father*” and “*love of the world*” are incompatible; they are mutually exclusive.

“*You can’t serve God and mammon*” (money god) Matthew 6:24. “*Friendship with the world is hatred toward God*”. James 4:4. It sounds harsh, but it is essentially a matter of devotion. “To whom/what will we be committed? Who/what will define us? Who/what will determine the trajectory of our lives?”

The world is “*sin in collaboration*”. It’s the culture created by a collection of humans who are intent on taking what is necessary and good for us (identity, significance, security) and attempting to satisfy them in in-humane ways (e.g. finances, careers, sexuality, etc.)

This may be the most difficult one to distinguish because we are so immersed in it. It’s difficult to identify it because it serves our interests so well (e.g. almost impossible for an American-capitalist to recognize consumerism as a problem or a moral issue).

We also live in a culture which is willing to overlook the method if it produces favorable results. It’s **the evil that looks good**: it’s the human-rights violations that make our jeans more affordable. It’s the unfair-trade practices which allow for a cheaper cup of coffee?

So, when the Bible says that God “*so loved the world*”, he is stubbornly committed to our good; he loves all that he has made, but not what we have “made of it”. He challenges us to not allow ourselves to adopt ways of thinking and practices that push the loving “God-boundaries” that he has established for us.

Ephesians 2:1-2 Paul says that before we trusted Jesus, we were “*following the course of the world*”.

2 Peter 1:4 says, “*Keep yourselves from being corrupted by the world.*”

The flesh... (the evil within us) 1 John 2:16; James 4:1-2

The Story’s way of describing humanity’s inward-compulsions to satisfy ourselves apart from God [failure to recognize our limits; to push the boundaries]. It designates humanity as self-absorbed, self-centered, and self-reliant.

The world will always give us permission to put ourselves “first”; to be the “center” of life. The world will always appeal to our “grasping instinct” and offer us a means of indulging our desires apart from God.

Imagine what happens when the ‘grasping instinct’ meets ‘misdirected and insatiable desire’? The results are disastrous.

Not only do we eat, work and play within systems which distance us from the God-story; not only do those systems appeal to our self-indulgent fantasies and feed our “grasping” instincts, but we are introduced to a personal, disembodied evil presence who is determined, not simply to inconvenience or irritate you, but to see that you come to ruin.

The devil... (the evil beyond us).

However we might imagine ‘the Satan’ (accuser; opposer), it becomes apparent from the Biblical worldview, that there is a personal evil which opposes God and his good creation in ways that are both deceptive and destructive.

Jesus depicts him as *“the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning”* (John 8:44). The word **‘beginning’** in the sense of **‘first cause’**.

“prince of the world” (John 12:31); *“god of this world”* (2 Corinthians 4:4); *“spirit at work in the hearts of the disobedient”* (Ephesians 2:2)

The narrative offers ‘The Satan’ as a powerful, created being who wants to convince the humans that the Creator can’t be trusted; that they should leverage their “right to rule” (authority) as a means of establishing “good and evil”.

Evil can never offer itself authentically; to do so would be to expose its weaknesses and diminish its effectiveness.

If you knew it would ultimately result in self-destruction, you wouldn’t pursue it. Paul challenges us not be *“ignorant of the devil’s schemes”* (2 Corinthians 2:11).

“schemes”- ‘cunning arts, deceitful, trickery, evil strategy/method’

deception- intentionally offering something as “true” which does not correspond with reality.

The best lies are the ones that are almost true. In order to be effective, the deception has to have some appeal to your desires. It’s not just some satanic attempt to get you consent to a collection of ideas.

We “sin” because we believe a lie about what we think will satisfy a legitimate, God-ordained, desire (e.g. when my disorderly desire gets attached to the lie that you are desirable as you please me, then committed, covenant- relationship and sexual intimacy gets reduced to gratification and the ‘hook up’).

We are not portrayed as hapless and innocent victims, but people (creatures) with propensities to satisfy ourselves and pursue meaning and life and security, independent of God.

The Story makes us aware that we are either partnering with “evil” (and contributing to the chaos/disorder), or we are collaborating with the kingdom of the heavens, in order to establish order and shalom.

Our challenge: we are not called to “quarantine ourselves”; we are not encouraged to stockpile a cache of weapons and canned goods and wait for the “mother-ship” (i.e. Christ) to return.

We are called to live with and with people and cultures with whom we disagree. At many points, we are able to find ‘common good’ which allows us to participate

without compromise. At other points, we may be called upon to express “humble, non-compliance”, but in ways that offers the world a healthier alternative (e.g. Daniel’s appeal for a different diet).