

Walking in the Light: Renouncing Worldliness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Dan. 5:13; John 15:19; Col. 1:14; 2:8, 13; 2 Pet. 3:10–12; 1 John 2:12–17.

Memory Text: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15, NIV).

In 1933, French author Andre Malraux published *Man's Fate*, a story about an ill-fated Marxist uprising in Shanghai, China, in the 1920s. In the story, a Marxist terrorist, Ch'en, is walking down the street when his first teacher, a Christian minister, approaches him and starts a conversation about Ch'en's loss of faith. Little does the teacher know that Ch'en, at the moment, is carrying a bomb and is on his way to a political assassination! Ch'en replies that he hasn't lost his faith; he has simply put it in politics, that's all.

“What political faith,” his former teacher asks with sadness, “will destroy death?”

In other words, no matter your political ideas, no matter the utopia you hope to create, it never will defeat humanity's great scourge: death.

While continuing to show us what it means to “walk in the light,” this week's texts point us to the temporality of our world in contrast to the eternal life found only in God.

The Week at a Glance: On what basis can we know that our sins are forgiven? What does it mean to know God? What does it mean not to love the things of the world? What's the ultimate fate of the world?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 1.*

“For His Name’s Sake”

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake” (1 John 2:12).

In 1 John 2:12–15, John addresses “little children” and “fathers” and “young men.” Though various suggestions have been made about what he meant by this division, we suggest that the “children” refers to all church members, because John uses the expression *children* in this sense in his epistle (1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7; 4:4; 5:21). The “fathers” would represent older church members, and the “young men” younger members. In short, he’s writing to everyone.

In 1 John 2:12, he tells them all that their sins are forgiven. On what basis is that forgiveness found? Why is it so important for Christians to know that their sins are forgiven? See also Acts 5:31, Rom. 4:7, Eph. 4:32, Col. 1:14, 2:13.

John wants his hearers, faithful church members, to have absolute assurance of their salvation. He is referring back to his discussion of the topic of sin as found in 1 John 1:9 and 2:1, 2, stressing that to be a Christian means to have this forgiveness. Christians do not deny their sinfulness but have accepted salvation through Jesus Christ and, therefore, live with the assurance of being forgiven.

The crucial point is for Christians to understand that the basis of their salvation is found only in Jesus and in what Jesus has done for them. That’s why John says they have been forgiven—not on the basis of their good deeds, not on the basis of their beliefs, and not even on the basis of their knowledge of God, but rather for “his name’s sake”—on the basis of Jesus and what He has done for them. Thus, in the midst of all John’s talk about overcoming, about obedience, he keeps the emphasis before them that salvation comes only because of Jesus.

How important is it to you to know that you have forgiveness of sins? Where would you be today if you were to doubt that forgiveness? Also, why must you always remember that the basis of forgiveness is found in Jesus, not in yourself?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 John 2:15–17*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Experience what it means to live in this world but not be part of it.

Feel: Assured of his or her salvation.

Do: Live a life with a heavenly focus.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: Getting the Right Focus

A What would you include in the expression “loving the things of this world”? Why are love of the world and love of the Father incompatible?

B Discuss the role of forgiveness in walking in the light.

C We often sing, “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine,” but putting it into practice can be challenging. How can we be assured that our sins are forgiven? Explain how this impacts your life.

II. Feel: Appreciate the Gift of Salvation

A In what ways can we experience the absolute assurance of salvation?

B God freely forgives us, regardless of what we have done. How can we foster this attitude of forgiveness in our relationships with others? Must we in every case forgive? Explain.

III. Do: Renouncing Worldly Things

A Sometimes it is difficult to focus on the unseen and eternal. Share ways that have helped you keep your focus on the eternal.

B What responsibility comes with owning worldly goods? How should they be used?

C Practice how you briefly could explain to someone what it means to be forgiven.

► **Summary:** Part of walking in the light is abandoning the transient things of this world; this should be easy in contrast to what we’re offered instead: eternal life.

Overcoming the Wicked One

Read 1 John 2:13, 14. What do these verses say to us? What positive message is coming from them, and how can we apply them to our lives?

The children are reminded that they know the Father, while the fathers are reminded that they know Him who is from the beginning. Obviously this person is Jesus. “In the beginning” is attributed to Jesus in 1 John 1:1. It seems to make more sense when, in our verses here, the Father and He who is from the beginning (Jesus) are two different persons.

When the young men are addressed a second time, the phrase “you have overcome the evil one” (*NIV*) is repeated, but the statement is expanded. The young men have overcome not just the evil but Satan himself, because they belong to Christ and claim His victory. The original language indicates that the overcoming has been achieved in the past, but the consequences are an ongoing reality. The young men also are spiritually strong, and the “word of God” dwells in them.

The Word of God points to its author, the Holy Spirit (*Eph. 6:17, 2 Pet. 1:21*). Therefore, some expositors have suggested that in these verses an implicit reference to the Trinity is found: God the Father, Jesus as the One who is from the beginning, and the Holy Spirit represented through the Word of God. In the end, true believers have come to know God and continue to know Him; that is, they have an intimate relationship with Him.

Thus, in these verses we’re given the essence of the Christian life: forgiveness of sins, knowing the Godhead, victory over sin, and the Word of God living in us.

Because believers know that God and His Word live in them, they are ready for the challenge issued in verses 15 through 17. While verses 12 through 14 contain affirmative statements, verse 15 begins with an imperative, a call or command: “Do not love the world” (*NKJV*).

Write a paragraph in which you answer the question, *What does it mean to know God?* What does your answer tell you about yourself and your relationship to God? Work on your answer through the week and be prepared (if you are willing) to share it in class on Sabbath.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Even as Christians live in the world, they need to reject the values and priorities of the world.

Just for Teachers: **Regardless of one’s age or faith maturity, everyone needs to be aware of what it means to live a Christian life in this world. Share with the class the apostle’s burden for living the Christian life (1 John 2:12–17).**

Every soul cries out for God. It seems this instinct to worship is so deeply encoded in our DNA that even someone who professes not to believe in a Creator feels impelled to satisfy the need for one in other—sometimes bizarre—ways. Such, apparently, was the case with Friedrich Nietzsche, an atheist and arguably the most influential philosopher of the nineteenth century. Nietzsche announced that God was dead. Yet, in his sunset days he was alleged to have been found in a park, hugging a statue of a horse and whispering to it, “Be my God.” Ironic, isn’t it? Nietzsche’s need for God was so strong that it overthrew his own objections, impelling him to venerate an inanimate, man-made statue. Sadly, forging a god from an animal is nothing new. Nietzsche’s actions call to mind Aaron’s forging of a golden calf, which he presented before Israel with the words, “This is your god” (*Exod. 52:4, NKJV*). In a world that seduces with its golden opportunities for wealth, passion, and self-indulgence, we are every bit as vulnerable as Israel to the temptation to forget heaven.

Aaron’s golden calf. Nietzsche’s bronze horse. What kind of God is yours?

Discuss: Nietzsche made reason a god instead of worshiping the God who made reason, and, in the end, reason abandoned him. With Nietzsche’s story in mind, why must we abandon what the world calls reason, even at the risk of appearing “unreasonable,” in our attempt to be in the world but not of it?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: **The apostle tells the community of faith that**

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Renouncing Any Love of the World *(1 John 2:15)*

Christians are admonished not to love the world. How does Scripture define the term *world*? *John 12:19, 15:19, Acts 17:24, Rom. 1:20, Col. 2:8, 1 Tim. 6:7, James 4:4, Rev. 11:15.*

The term *kosmos* (translated “world”) designates the universe, the earth, humankind, the realm of existence, and the way of life opposed to God. The term occurs more than twenty times in 1 John and 2 John. The world needs salvation (*1 John 4:14*), yet it is hostile to God and His people (*1 John 3:13*). It lies in the power of the evil one (*1 John 5:19*), and false prophets, antichrists, and deceivers are in the world (*1 John 4:1, 3; 2 John 7*). It is not wrong to possess the world’s goods, but they should be shared with the needy (*1 John 3:17*). Finally, the world needs to be overcome (*1 John 5:4, 5*). In the Johannine epistles the term *world* is predominantly a negative term, because the world is in rebellion against God.

An interesting tension arises in Scripture regarding our relationship to the world. On the one hand, we are told not to love the world, but then on the other hand, the Bible is clear that God loves the world (*John 3:16*). Meanwhile we are told not to love the things in the world, yet we are admonished, again and again in Scripture, to love people, and people are certainly in the world.

How do you understand the tension here? How are we to love people and yet not love the world, when the world is, primarily, people? Are there some things in the world, other than people, that we can love too? If so, what?

The end of verse 15, and the next verse, help us to understand what John has in mind. He does not say we should hate humans or despise planet Earth; rather, we should hate the things of the world that, if cherished by us, will keep us from knowing and experiencing for ourselves the love of God. That is, we need to stay away from the things of the world that will keep us from having a saving relationship with God.

Be painfully honest with yourself. What are some of the things of the world that you love and you know are wrong? Or are there things in the world that, of themselves, aren’t bad but that you love more than God? What will it take to make you give them up?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

they are the most blessed on earth and, at the same time, the most beset by dangers. Emphasize in this lesson that they will explore both the joys and the struggles of Christian life.

Bible Commentary

I. The Christian Privilege (Read 1 John 2:12–14 with your class.)

The apostle outlines three privileges unique to Christian fellowship. **First, our sins are forgiven** “for His name’s sake” (*vs. 12*). The name *Jesus* means He is the Savior (*Matt. 1:21*). Through Him “ ‘is preached to you the forgiveness of sins’ ” (*Acts 13:38, NKJV*); “ ‘for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ ” (*Acts 4:12, NKJV*).

A name in biblical thought is more than just a name. When the psalmist prays, “For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity” (*Ps. 25:11*), he refers not just to God’s name but to what God is: merciful and gracious and worthy of all trust. To call upon Jesus as the Source of forgiveness is to place complete faith in what Christ has done in human flesh. Because of who Jesus is and what He has done on the cross, His name is the Christian’s “badge of distinction.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 28.

Second, we know God, “who is from the beginning” (*1 John 2:13, 14, NKJV*). Humanity is ever in search of God. Some turn to philosophy; some to a universal principle; some to an idol. But Christians know Him “who is from the beginning”—the Creator. They know Him as the One whom the apostles “heard” and had “seen” (*1 John 1:1*)—Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. They know Him as the One whose “blood . . . cleanses us from all sin” (*1 John 1:7, NKJV*). To know God is to affirm an intimate, relational experience—as close as a child-father experience.

Third, we have victory over sin and the world (*1 John 2:13, 14*). “Victory” is a strong component of John’s vocabulary. Of the 28 times the Greek word related to the idea of “victory” appears in the New Testament, 24 are found in John’s writings. He was an eyewitness to the Cross and the Resurrection, which affected God’s ultimate victory over sin and Satan. To the apostle, victory is a crucial core of Christian living: “You have overcome the wicked one” (*vs. 13, NKJV*).

Victory over sin is not simply living a moral and ethical life. It is affirming a personal victory over the devil and then going on to live the sanctified life. This privilege is not our doing but Christ’s. We overcome

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Problems With the World

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

While verse 15 is quite a broad warning against loving the world, verse 16 now spells out some details. What does it mean to love the world? John mentions three things: (1) the lust of the flesh, (2) the lust of the eyes, and (3) the boastful pride of life. John says that these three things are not of the Father but of the world; yet, our flesh, our eyes, and our life all come from God. What, then, is the problem? What is John warning us against?

Lust of the flesh, obviously, deals with passions, though it does not have to be limited to that alone (*see Gal. 5:19–21*).

Lust of the eyes, though certainly linked to the flesh, takes it deeper, takes it to our thoughts, our desires, to the things that we see and want for ourselves (*see Exod. 20:17*).

What does John mean about “the pride of life”? What is this, and why is it so bad? See Job 12:10, Acts 17:28.

The idea of “the pride of life” implies independence from God. It’s as if we created our lives, and hence the glory and honor of any of our accomplishments should belong to us. “Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (*Ps. 100:3*). In contrast, when we realize that every breath, every heartbeat, everything that we could ever have or be comes only from God, upon whom we’re utterly dependent, pride will be the last thing in our hearts. As sinful, fallen beings whose very existence depends totally on the grace and beneficence of our God, as beings utterly incapable of saving ourselves from eternal death and destruction, we should be humble and meek regarding our lives, not full of pride about them. It was pride that brought the fall of Lucifer in a perfect world; as beings in an imperfect one, we should flee it like the plague.

Which is it for you? Lust of the flesh? Lust of the eyes? The pride of life? Or any combination thereof? What’s your only hope? What are you waiting for to make the changes that must come?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

because Christ overcame. His victory is our victory. His strength is our strength (*see John 16:33, Rom. 8:31–39*).

Discuss: According to 1 John 2:12–17, what are the factors by which we can be sure of our salvation?

II. The Christian Struggle (*Read 1 John 2:14–17 with your class.*)

Even though believers have victory (*1 John 2:14*), the apostle cautions them on two counts. **First, “do not love the world or the things in the world”** (*1 John 2:15, NKJV*). Obviously, “the world” does not refer to the physical world, which is pronounced good (*Gen. 1:31*). Nor does it refer to the world of people, whom God loves. It means the world of sin: the present evil system under the control of Satan. This system stands in opposition to God’s priorities, explained in 1 John 2:12–15: forgiveness of sin, knowing and living with God, leading a victorious life over sin, and abiding in God’s Word. To be a Christian one must renounce the world of sin and the things that such a world claims as its own.

Second, John mentions three specifics of the world that a believer must reject: “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (*vs. 16*). Together they typify a lifestyle and a worldview dominated by the love of self, rejection of God, and glorifying in the things of the world. Witness, as examples, the destructiveness of those who embraced this worldview: Eve’s embracing the serpent’s words because the fruit was “pleasant to the eyes”; David’s arrogant misuse of power and his urge to satisfy the desires of the flesh, which ended in adultery and murder; Jezebel’s dehumanizing pride that destroyed Naboth. A Christian does not belong to such a world. They have moved on to another world, where to die is to live, to love is to serve, and to worship God is to obey Him at all costs.

Discuss: Jesus said that we are “in the world” but “not of the world” (*John 17:11, 14*). What does this mean?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Thought Questions:

- 1 What kind of new moral taste does the believer receive upon conversion? How does it differ from the world’s?

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The Transient Nature of the World *(1 John 2:17)*

In verse 16 the apostle presents the first reason that we should not love the world: the love of the world and the love of the Father are incompatible. In verse 17 John adds a second reason: It does not make sense to love the world, because the world is impermanent. It is better and wiser to choose that which lasts. By doing so, we ourselves also will last—that is, we will live forever.

Humanity is tempted to live by the moment, to be captivated by the material world, and to treasure only what can be seen. Therefore, Paul joins John by saying, “Keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (*Col. 3:1–4, NASB*), and, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (*2 Cor. 4:18, NIV*).

What does the Bible teach in other places about the transitory nature of the world and planet Earth? *Dan. 2:35, 1 Cor. 7:31, 2 Pet. 3:10–12.*

In 1 John 2:8, John had already stated that the darkness was passing away. Now he uses the same verb and says that the world is passing away, including its lust. A new era has come with the incarnation of Jesus, the Light. The things of this world are passing away; that should be obvious to everyone. Political solutions never can be the ultimate solution, not in a world that’s passing away and we along with it.

If the world is passing away, how can we survive? John answers: by doing the will of God. Although correct theology is important and John tries to refute the false teachers with their misguided understanding of Jesus and sin, it also is important to live a life of obedience. Ethics cannot be separated from theology. Pious words and correct doctrines are not enough. Our theology must be lived.

Let us not get so comfortable here that we forget our eternal goal; let us not compromise our love for God by being attracted to those things and attitudes that are hostile to Him.

What examples of the transient nature of things on earth do you see every day? What do they say to you? Why—when it’s so obvious that things here don’t last—do we find it so easy to live our lives as if they do?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

2 Make two lists: things that God loves and the things that the world loves. How is your everyday life affected by these?

Application Questions:

1 Being in the world and not of the world is a spiritual choice, essential to the salvation experience. It means a daily choice. How does this choice affect our daily decisions? Share specific situations.

2 We are called to be imitators of Christ. But we see many worldly practices creeping into our daily lives. What are some of these practices, and how do you face them? How do we witness without imitating the world?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The Bible commentary section of this learning cycle mentions Eve, David, and Jezebel. Challenge your students to compare and contrast their lives, using the questions below to guide their exploration. Invite class members to present what they learned to the class.

1 Bible Study Project: How were Eve, David, and Jezebel similar in their choices? How were they different? Which of the three areas—lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, the pride of life mentioned by John—was each one particularly vulnerable to? What cautionary and instructive lessons about their choices and the consequences can be applied to our lives? In what kind of situations would the lessons drawn from their lives particularly be useful?

2 Dramatic Monologue: Write a monologue, based on the character study, in the voice of Eve, David, or Jezebel that narrates his or her experience. Have class members volunteer either to read or to perform their monologue for the class.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Worldliness in the Church,” pp. 196, 197, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2.

“Professed Christians yearly expend an immense sum upon useless and pernicious indulgences, while souls are perishing for the word of life. God is robbed in tithes and offerings, while they consume upon the altar of destroying lust more than they give to relieve the poor or for the support of the gospel. . . . The world is given up to self-indulgence. ‘The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life’ control the masses of the people. But Christ’s followers have a holier calling. . . . In the light of God’s word we are justified in declaring that sanctification cannot be genuine which does not work this utter renunciation of the sinful pursuits and gratifications of the world.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 475.

Positively speaking, our passage tells us that genuine Christians have an intimate relationship with the Godhead, manifest loving obedience, have received strength to conquer evil, and have God’s Word dwelling in them. Their sins have been forgiven. Negatively, they do not love the world but reject it where it is hostile to God and His cause.

Discussion Questions:

1 Our world is purely transitory. It won’t last forever; even science—with all its weaknesses—tells us that. What hope, however, does the Bible offer us that science doesn’t?

2 Some people, heeding the call against loving the world, isolate themselves from the world as much as they can, moving into monasteries or communities that are radically separate from the norm. Is this a good idea? Bad idea? Might it be good in some cases? Discuss.

3 In class, discuss your answer to Monday’s question about what it means to know God.

4 What are some things in the world that, in and of themselves, might not be bad, might not work against the knowledge of God, yet are often made that way because of how people use them?

5 Why is victory over sin such an important part of what it means to “walk in the light”? How can you have this victory?
