

**Psalm 2:1–3, John 3:16–21, 1 John 2:15–17  
and Resisting the World**

## Prayer

## Introductory Questions

- Christians must resist the influences of *the world*. What is *the world*?
- In what ways are you tempted to love the world and the things in the world?

## Introduction

This lesson explains the nature of *the world* and how to resist its influences. One way to approach this topic is to study the Greek word *kosmos*. The word can refer to the planet earth (Matt. 4:8) or the entire created order (Acts 17:24). But this lesson focuses on two other meanings of the word:

**1. The world can refer to human beings in rebellion against God and Jesus Christ.**

Apart from God’s redeeming grace, humans are hostile toward God and unwilling to trust in his Son, Jesus: “He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet *the world* [humanity in rebellion] did not recognize him” (John 1:10; cf. 1:12).

*The concept* of humanity in rebellion against God cannot be reduced to one meaning of a word. We see examples of human rebellion against God from Genesis 3 through Revelation 20. Human rebellion began with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1–6). Their descendants, which include each of us, fall into one of two categories—those who reject God in their lives, and those who trust in and submit to him. Put simply, people are either part of *the world* or they are part of *the people of God* (the church) (John 1:10; Col. 1:18).

**2. The world can refer to the evil parts of culture, which are produced and enjoyed by sinners.<sup>1</sup>**

James writes: “...Don’t you know that friendship with *the world* is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of *the world* becomes the enemy of God” (4:4). And John warns us not to “love *the world* or the things in *the world*” (1 John 2:15).

*The concept* of evil embedded within culture is found throughout the Bible. God commands us to not love the character qualities, values, thoughts, words, actions, and other cultural products that reflect rebellion against him, such as vanity, materialism, and pornography.

We explore both concepts below by focusing on these passages from Scripture: Psalm 2:1–3, John 3:16–21, and 1 John 2:15–17. We conclude this lesson by summarizing how we can resist the influences of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> A definition adapted from John Frame, as cited in Naselli, “Do Not Love the World,” *SBJT* 22.1, 114.

## 1. The World: Humanity in Rebellion Against God and His Anointed One

1 Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 2 The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire together against the LORD and his Anointed One: 3 “Let’s tear off their chains and throw their ropes off of us.” (Ps. 2:1–3)

Psalm 2:1–3 powerfully illustrates the concept of the world—humanity in rebellion against God. The psalmist describes the nations as raging, plotting, standing, and conspiring against the LORD (Yahweh) and his anointed one, the Davidic king (vv. 1–2). The nations and their leaders desire to break free from the LORD and his anointed one—as if they were oppressive slave masters (v. 3). The New Testament authors viewed Jesus as the ultimate Anointed One of God and the ultimate Davidic King—who the nations reject and against whom they rage (Matt. 1:1, 6; Acts 4:24–28; Heb. 1:5). Prior to becoming Christians, we were part of the world standing in rebellion against God and Jesus (John 1:10), and therefore we walked according to the world’s ways (Eph. 2:2). We were members, active contributors, and joyful participants of the world—a worldwide community of rebels.

- What is rebellion? How do non-Christians rebel against God and Jesus?
- In what ways does God respond to such rebellion?

## 2. God’s Love for the World and Two Responses to the Light

- “16 For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.” (John 3:16–18)
- “19 This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. 21 But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.” (John 3:19–21)

God the Father demonstrated the greatness and intensity of his love for the world (rebellious humans) by giving his one and only Son, Jesus, to die (v. 16). God feels and acts with affection for the well-being of sinners. Everyone who trusts in Jesus will not perish eternally, but they have eternal life (even now) with God (John 3:36). God has determined to send his Son into the world on two occasions—two comings. Regarding the Son’s first coming, God did not send him to condemn the world, but to save or deliver the world from sin through the Son (v. 17). Regarding the Son’s second coming, God will send him to condemn the world and

gather his people to himself (Matt. 24:29–31; Rev. 19:11–16). Anyone who trusts in the Son is not (and will not be) condemned (v. 18). But anyone who does not trust in him is already condemned, because they have not trusted in the name (the person) of God’s only Son.

John then described the world’s (humanity’s) condemnation using metaphorical terms—light and darkness. Jesus is the light (holy and pure revelation from God) that came into the created order through his incarnation (v. 19; cf. 1:14). But people loved the moral darkness rather than the light (who is Jesus) because their deeds were evil. Everyone who persistently does evil hates Jesus and his revelation, and they seek to avoid him and his revelation, so that their deeds, they hope, will not be exposed (v. 20). But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that their works may be shown to be carried out in union with God and by his power (v. 21; *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, 1897).

- Why is *light* such an appropriate way to describe Jesus?
- Why do people living in moral darkness reject and seek to avoid Jesus?

### 3. The Command to Not Love the World

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one’s possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever. (1 John 2:15–17)

John commands us to not love the world or the things in the world. While we are called to love all people (including non-Christians), we must not love (desire, value, and enjoy) the evil parts of culture (v. 15). Why not? Because if anyone loves the world, that person does not love the Father. Every sinful desire and thing *in* the world is not from the Father but is *from* the world (v. 16). This includes the lust of the flesh (what our hearts sinfully desire), the lust of the eyes (what we see and then sinfully desire), and the pride in one’s possessions (a self-exalting view of ourselves that is based on our money and our possessions). Another reason we should not love the world is that the world, along with its lust, is passing away—a way of life that will eventually disappear entirely (v. 17). But the one who does the will of God (thereby not loving the world and the things in the world) remains with God forever.

- In what ways are you tempted to love the world and the things in it?
- What are reasons we should not love the world?

## Sound Doctrine: Resisting the Influences of the World

Below are ways we can resist the influences of the world—the evil parts of culture.

1. **If you have not already done so, become a Christian while there is still time.** Turn from sin and trust in Jesus. Doing so transfers you from the world (humanity gathered in rebellion against God and Jesus) to the church (humanity gathered in worship).
2. **Avoid both legalism and lawlessness.**<sup>2</sup> Legalism emphasizes strict adherence to man-made rules that push beyond what is clearly stated in Scripture or reasonably derived from Scripture (such as the legalistic claim that it is always wrong to drink alcohol). Lawlessness involves a disregard for ethical standards, whether those standards are clearly stated in Scripture or reasonably derived from Scripture (such as justifying delight in violence or sexual images based on one’s perceived freedom; Ps. 11:5; Matt. 5:27–30).
3. **Identify and turn away from worldliness—which is a mindset and lifestyle that values, desires, creates, and enjoys the evil parts of a culture.** We are often tempted:
  - to love the world’s view of **our value as human beings**—which emphasizes that our worth is based on our appearance, possessions, power, or popularity
  - to love the world’s view of **sex**—which values sexual gratification outside the context of marriage, which is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman
  - to love the world’s view of **wealth**—which views money as the primary way we measure success or as a tool to endlessly gratify ourselves at the expense of others
  - to love the world’s view of **appearance**—which focuses on external attractiveness, often to the neglect of focusing on internal attractiveness (Christlike character)
  - to love the world’s view of **social media**—which is a means of promoting ourselves to others, often at the expense of drawing attention to God
  - to love the world’s view of **truth**—which suggests that there is no such thing as absolute truth and, even if there was, it is impossible to know it
  - to love the world’s view of **ethics**—which rejects God’s word to determine what is right and wrong, but instead elevates human reason, our consciences, or societal norms to dictate or justify morality
4. **Strive to be God-centered, Christ-centered, and Spirit-directed in all that you do in light of God’s revealed will in Scripture.** In this way, we must *turn from* worldliness and *turn to* God in faith with a view toward obeying him. Holiness requires both. See the lessons in the Discipleship Series called “Our New Life in Christ.”

- What comments and questions do you have about this lesson?
- What is one thing you can do in response to this lesson?

## Prayer

<sup>2</sup> Naselli’s article, mentioned earlier, addresses these dangers, 119.