



Discussion Guide

Weeding Our Lives—1 John 2.15-17

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o Describe a time when you “fell in love.” What did it feel like? In what ways did this feeling affect you?
- o Optional Intro: What from the sermon, if anything, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

Setting the Stage: *Love is central to the life of a believer. After all, God is love. Love is to overflow from our lives in an unending, never-stopping, always kind of way. Have you ever wondered just where we are to direct all this love? With so much love coming out of us, there ought to be enough to go around, for everyone and everything. Can it be wrong to love? At first blush it doesn't seem to be possible, and then we come upon the words of John forbidding love. What!?! How can a people whose lives are overflowing with love be strictly forbidden to love? What is John saying about love that makes it so off-limits? Maybe love isn't supposed to go around quite like we imagined. Maybe love is supposed to be given a bit more discriminately. OK, but if that is true where is all this never-stopping, unending love supposed to go?*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- 1 John 2.15-17. (*Leader Note:* You may wish to use the *Group Notes* section to provide context.)
- What prohibitions does John give? What do you understand to be the reasoning behind these prohibitions?
- What tensions might these prohibitions create for those who follow Jesus? Can you elaborate?
- John seems to be prohibiting a love for the world system, that which stands opposed to God. What might devotion/love to the world system look like? Can you give examples you have seen?
- How might this love prove detrimental for a follower of Christ?
- Consider your own life. Where do you see love for the world in your life?
- What, if anything, makes loving only God difficult for you? Can you elaborate?
- What might it take to interrupt a love for the world in your life and refocus this love upon God? Would you be willing to take any of these steps?
- How might your group help or encourage you to love God only?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

Group Notes

Weeding Our Life: 1 John 2.15-17

Context and Background

1 John: The letter of 1 John was written by the apostle John sometime in the late first century. More than likely, John intended his letter for churches in Asia Minor as early church tradition locates John's ministry in Ephesus. The letter is probably a response to churches who were struggling with misinterpretations of John's Gospel. The Gospel of John has been called the most spiritual of the Gospels; that is, the Gospel of John emphasizes the spiritual/divine nature of Jesus. At the same time the Gospel was written, a philosophy called Gnosticism was growing in Asia Minor. Gnosticism was a philosophy rooted in Greek thought that emphasized dualism, the separation of spirit and body with spirit being good and body being evil. The nature of John's Gospel combined with the growth of Gnostic thought led some believers into error. They began to view Jesus as a purely spiritual being, denying his humanity. Furthermore, these believers were tempted by their growing Gnostic views to disregard all forms of morality because they believed the body was evil and thus it did not matter how one lived. The letter of 1 John seems to address both of these errors. First, John strongly emphasizes the humanity of Jesus by speaking to the reality of the incarnation (1 John 1.1-4; 4.1.6). Second, John addresses those who would reject all forms of morality by addressing the importance of the daily life of believers (1 John 1.5-3.24; 4.7-21).

Desire: The concept of desire is central to understanding what John means with his prohibition to love the world. In the ancient world, desire simply meant to be excited about something, to have a motivating attachment to something or someone. However, the term developed bad connotations in ethical discussions because desire was viewed as arising from faulty evaluations of possessions and the evils of life. In the New Testament, when used as a noun, desire almost always has negative overtones. Jesus states that desire is one of the major factors in derailing one's faith (Mark 4.19). Paul notes that desire has the potential to enslave the believer (Romans 6.12). He also states that desire is a direct result of choosing to reject God (Romans 1.24). The key in understanding how John and other New Testament authors use the term "desire" seems to lie in grasping that their negative evaluation concerns the object of desire rather than the nature of desire. By definition, desire is a part of life. Human beings are created with the God-given capacity to desire. Thus, desire is a natural and intended part of life. Where desire goes wrong is in its focus. God created people to desire Him (Psalm 40.8; 37.4; 73.25; Deuteronomy 6.5). Thus when focused upon God, desire is actually fruitful and good. However, when people reject God and their desire becomes fixed upon something other than God, it serves to move one further away from Him. Such desire is forbidden as it is destructive to one experiencing life and God as He intended it (Exodus 20.17; Romans 1.18-25).

World: In no uncertain terms, John forbids those who follow Jesus from loving the world. This seems to run counter to John's own statement that God loves the world (John 3.16). It is important to understand that the term "world" can refer to the physical world and people within it as well as the world system. It is the former that God loves as it is His creation. The latter is often portrayed negatively as the world system opposes God and His intentions in

the created order (1 John 4.3-5; 5.19; John 16.33). It is therefore love of the world system that is forbidden by John.

The Text

Prohibition of worldly love (1 John 2.15a): John's prohibition against loving the world comes as the second part of his direct address to his readers which begins in verse 12. Beginning in verse 12, John addresses his readers as children, which he then divides into two groups: fathers and young men. As the address to the fathers and young men is almost identical, John's points are found in his statements about children. Considering these, we see that he addresses his readers as those who have been forgiven and come to know God in a personal way. Because this is who they are, love for the world is inappropriate. At first John's statement might seem to contradict God's own love for the world. However, John is more than likely referring to love for the world system. (See *World*.) It is also important to grasp the meaning of love as understood by John's readers. For them, love was not an emotional attachment but a devotion that directed and motivated one's way of life and being. Thus, John prohibits a devotion to the world system as being inappropriate for those who know God and have experienced His forgiveness.

Incompatibility of worldly love (1 John 2.15b-17): John explains why love for the world is inappropriate for those who know God and have been forgiven in two steps. First, he states that love for the world and love for God are incompatible. They cannot exist at the same time in the same person. This echoes Jesus' own statement calling his followers to choose between devotion to him and mammon, a reference to the world system (Matthew 6.24). According to John and Jesus, one cannot face two directions at the same time. One must simply choose. Second, John states that the aspects of the world system are not from God. The world itself owes its existence to God. However, the things of the world that people desire, money, power, fame, attention, and the like are not from God but stand opposed to God. This is summed up in John's statement of boasting in life, a reference to relying on the things that make up life rather than relying upon God. As not coming from God, the things that comprise the world system will one day pass away. Therefore, in devoting oneself to these things, one is attached to things that will one day cease to exist. However, devotion to God and His will leads one to participate in those things that are eternal. John's logic is plain. It makes little sense to spend one's life on things that do not last.

Application: One of the most important questions a follower of Christ must ask concerns whom they love. Another way of phrasing this question is to consider what we as Christ-followers want most. What is our greatest motivating desire? For those who claim to know God and be forgiven of sin, the only appropriate object of desire is God Himself. However, what is appropriate and what is truly present are often two separate realities. Our lives are often cluttered with desire that is focused on anything but God. Those of us for whom this reality applies must seek ways to clear that which clutters so that we might live for God and His greater purpose.

