



**Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World**

C. J. Mahaney, **Editor**

Craig Cabaniss

Bob Kauflin

Dave Harvey

Jeff Purswell

**Foreword by** John Piper

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*Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World*

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To the pastors of Sovereign Grace Ministries  
with gratitude and respect  
for your faithful proclamation of Christ and him crucified

“Far be it from me to boast  
except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
by which the world has been crucified to me,  
and I to the world.”

*Galatians 6:14*



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## Contributors

**Craig Cabaniss** planted Grace Church in Frisco, Texas, in 2005 and serves as its senior pastor. He was previously senior pastor of Grace Church in San Diego, California, for nine years.

**Dave Harvey** serves on the leadership team of Sovereign Grace Ministries, where he oversees church planting and church care. He is the author of *When Sinners Say "I Do": Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage*.

**Bob Kauflin** is director of worship development for Sovereign Grace Ministries and serves as a pastor and worship leader at Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland. He is the author of *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God*.

**C. J. Mahaney** leads Sovereign Grace Ministries in its mission to establish and strengthen local churches. He served as pastor of Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland, for twenty-seven years. His books include *Living the Cross Centered Life*.

**Jeff Purswell** is dean of the Pastors College of Sovereign Grace Ministries and is a pastor at Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland. He is the editor of *Bible Doctrine*, an abridgment of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*.

## Foreword

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, Noël and I didn't kiss in our wedding. It was the sixties. You had to rebel. You could either take your clothes off, or not kiss. We chose not to kiss. Within the framework of our immaturity, it was a good choice.

That's the way my rebellious streak worked most of the time—in-your-face conservatism. So there, all you copycat worldlings! I'm not gettin' on your liberal wagon.

It's been a useful bent. There's nothing especially godly about it, but it was redeemable. And I pray that over time it has been redeemed. It's truths like those in this book that have made all the difference.

Gospel truths. The gospel makes all the difference between whether you are merely conservative or whether you are conquering worldliness in the power of the Spirit for the glory of Christ.

C. J. Mahaney and his gang, as always, are in the business of applying the gospel. What does it look like when the blood of Christ governs the television and the Internet and the iPod and the checkbook and the neckline? Most people have never even asked this question, let alone answered it. The only way most folks know how to draw lines is with rulers. The idea that lines might come into being freely and lovingly (and firmly) as the fruit of the gospel is rare. That's why this book is valuable.

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This band of gospel-lovers is also in touch with the real challenges that we face in music and movies and media and material possessions and modesty. They are writing as fellow strugglers in the world. They are not writing as culture-fleers or culture-deniers. They are pleading for discernment, and they are persuaded that movie ratings do not equal biblical discernment.

They are eager for the church to “Enjoy the world . . . Engage the world . . . Evangelize the world.” But they know that we will never be useful to the world if we are being deeply shaped by the world. And we *will* be shaped by the world without intentional efforts not to be.

Read this book sympathetically. That is, when you see the sentence, “The world God forbids us to love is the fallen world,” don’t say, “Hey, God loved the world! It says so in John 3:16!” These guys aren’t stupid. In fact, they are smart. So read on, and see what the context demands. Be smart with them.

A word to pastors: this book is a gift to you. It will help you help others—by the modeling that’s done here and by the exegetical reflection and by the biblical and cultural insights. I can see whole churches reading this together as the pastor fleshes out the biblical foundations from the pulpit. What a powerful season that would be in the life of the church.

The apostle Paul has a vision for our minds: “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil. 4:8).

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May the Lord of all beauty purify our minds so that these are our greatest delights. In the end, the sum of all beauty is Christ, and the sin of all worldliness is to diminish our capacity to see him and be satisfied in him and show him compellingly to a perishing world.

*John Piper*

Pastor for Preaching and Vision,  
Bethlehem Baptist Church  
Minneapolis, Minnesota





## Is This Verse in Your Bible?

**C. J. Mahaney**

HUNCHED OVER HIS DESK, penknife in hand, Thomas Jefferson sliced carefully at the pages of Holy Scripture, excising select passages and pasting them together to create a Bible more to his liking. The “Jefferson Bible.” A book he could feel comfortable with.

What didn’t make it into the Jefferson Bible was anything that conflicted with his personal worldview. Hell? It can’t be. The supernatural? Not even worth considering. God’s wrath against sin? I don’t think so. The very words of God regarded as leftover scraps.

Christians rightly shudder at such arrogant presumption. And no true Christian would be so bold as to attempt to create his or her own Bible, blatantly omitting whatever they don’t prefer.

But if we are honest, we too may have to admit that we have a Bible of our own making—a metaphorical one, perhaps, but a cut-and-paste job just the same. For if we ignore any portion of God’s Word—whether unintentionally, conveniently, or deliberately—we too are guilty of Jefferson’s offense.

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Sadly, I've been guilty on more than one occasion. I've opened my Bible and moved quickly to the encouraging and assuring passages, trying to avoid the difficult and challenging passages along the way.

Here's one verse I find easy to ignore. It's the simple, provocative words in 1 John 2:15:

"Do not love the world or anything in the world" (NIV).

There's nothing subtle about this sentence. It's abrupt and to the point—only ten words. It is categorical: "Do *not* love the world." It's comprehensive: "Do not love *anything* in the world." And it's intrusive, strategically aimed at whatever we desire most: "*anything in the world.*"

It forbids worldliness in no uncertain terms.

First John 2:15 isn't a verse we tend to underline when we come across it in our daily Bible reading. We're not inclined to put "Do not love the world" on an index card and rehearse it during our daily commute. We don't hear many sermons on this verse and its prohibition of the sin of worldliness.

We read, we live, as if it doesn't belong in our Bible.

Clip. Clip. Clip.

Before we know it, we have a Bible like Jefferson's, and 1 John 2:15 is nowhere to be found.

### Put Away the Scissors

Why do we try to create a Bible exclusive of this command?

Maybe, for all its simplicity, we're not exactly sure what it means. What is the author, John, getting at here? What does it mean for a Christian—what does it mean for *me*—not to love the world?

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Does it mean I can't watch MTV or go to an R-rated movie? Do I have to give up my favorite TV shows? Is it okay to watch a movie as long as I fast-forward the sex scene? How much violence or language is too much?

Are certain styles of music more worldly than others? Is the rap or indie music that I'm loading onto my iPod okay?

How do I know if I'm spending too much time playing games or watching YouTube clips online?

Can a Christian try to make lots of money, own a second home, drive a nice car, and enjoy the luxuries of modern life?

Am I worldly if I read fashion magazines and wear trendy clothes? Do I have to be out of style in order to be godly? How short is too short? How low is too low?

How do I know if I'm guilty of the sin of worldliness?

You may have questions like these. But maybe, if you're honest, you don't really want the answers—at least, not from middle-aged pastors like my coauthors and me. You may assume that we're out-of-touch and that worldliness is the predictable concern of men over forty who can't relate to the younger generation.

Maybe you worry that the aim of this book is to impose legalistic restrictions and enforce unrealistic rules. The idea of "resisting the seduction of a fallen world" sounds like something out of an Amish handbook. "Besides," you wonder, "how can we evangelize the world if we don't relate to it?"

Or perhaps you consider these matters to be private: "Don't tell me how to run my relationship with God." No one has the right to question or intrude. Your personal standards are sacred. You know how much of the world you can

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tolerate without becoming intoxicated, and no one else can tell you when you've had too much.

Whatever the reason, this verse makes you uncomfortable. It invades your personal space. You're afraid if you get too close, these ten little words might come between you and the things in the world you enjoy. You're reluctant to discuss "worldliness" because then you might have to change.

Or perhaps you think 1 John 2:15 (and thus this book) doesn't apply to you. Maybe because of your age, or your position in the church, or your reputation for godliness, you think you're immune to worldliness. From all outward appearances you're anything but worldly—a solid member of your local church, an exemplary Christian who worships on Sunday and faithfully attends a small group. You've never committed a scandalous sin. In fact, you may be reading this book for someone else.

If we don't ignore 1 John 2:15 outright, we load it up with qualifications. We file down its edges with explanations. We dismiss it as applying only to those more "worldly" than us. We empty it of its authority, its meaning for our day-to-day lives.

"Do not love the world" is not, however, an outdated command or a remnant of an over-scrupulous tradition. It is *God's Word*. It comes straight from a loving heavenly Father to you and me. And it demands our urgent attention.

For if we ignore this verse, we are not merely guilty of presuming to manufacture our own Bible; we're in danger of being seduced by a fallen world.

And this threat is not confined to a specific group of people. We're all susceptible. There's no such thing as immu-

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nity based on age or position or ability to absorb the world without its affecting us. When it comes to worldliness, we're all at risk.

Don't believe me? Then let me introduce you to one of the most tragic characters in the Bible. Meet Demas.

### **Demas the Deserter**

If ever there was a guy you'd have a hard time labeling "worldly," it would be Demas. Or so it seems.

As a close friend and traveling companion of the apostle Paul, Demas participated in spreading the gospel and strengthening the fledgling church throughout the Roman Empire. He left home and family to hit the long, dusty, and dangerous road with the itinerant apostle. He stood by Paul—likely at great personal risk—when the apostle landed in prison for the first time. We read of him sending greetings to the church in Colossae and to the Christian Philemon.

Here would appear to be a model Christian. A guy we would all admire, respect, and want to emulate.

Yet, a postscript in Paul's second letter to Timothy forms his epitaph: "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me" (2 Tim. 4:10).

Whoa. These words are like a kick to the gut. It's impossible to read them without feeling the sadness that was no doubt acutely felt by the apostle.

What a tragedy! A life wasted. A testimony ruined. The gospel maligned. For Demas, *in love with this present world*, not only deserted Paul and the saints—he deserted his Savior.

What happened? How did Demas go from passionate follower of Christ, close companion to the apostle, willing to

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risk all for the sake of the gospel, to *deserter*? Where did things go horribly wrong?

Before Demas deserted, he drifted.

It wasn't immediate. It wasn't obvious at first. He didn't go from disciple to deserter in a day. No, it was a gradual weakening, a subtle contaminating, and an eventual conforming to this world.

We all know a Demas—someone who, like a spiritual meteorite, burned bright with the love of Christ for a while, then suddenly (or so it seemed) faded from fellowship and turned his back on Christ, or fell into serious sin, leaving all to wonder what happened.

So often we're ignorant of the signs, the symptoms of worldliness. People can be attending church, singing the songs, apparently listening to the sermons—no different on the outside than they've always been.

But inside, that person is drifting. He sits in church but is not excited to be there. She sings songs without affection. He listens to preaching without conviction. She hears but does not apply.

A love for the world begins in the soul. It's subtle, not always immediately obvious to others, and often undetected by the people who are slowly succumbing to its lies.

It begins with a dull conscience and a listless soul. Sin does not grieve him like it once did. Passion for the Savior begins to cool. Affections grow dim. Excitement lessens for participating in the local church. Eagerness to evangelize starts to wane. Growth in godliness slows to a crawl.

In this way, the person who was once genuinely passionate for Christ—like Demas—is, over time, taken captive by sin.

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It's simply one more step from apparent follower to deserter.

So, are you drifting?

"Oh, it's not serious," you say. "I've just been in a busy season. Yeah, I'm not as excited about the gospel or the Christian life as I used to be, but I'm fine. I'm still attending church. It's not like I've left God or anything. I've just been preoccupied lately. I'll get back on track soon."

Was there a time you were passionate for God, characterized by extravagant devotion and love for the Savior? Demas was like that once too.

What about now? Have you fallen in love with this present world?

Sadly, Christians are largely unaware of the peril. Because we've ignored verses such as 1 John 2:15, we've become completely desensitized to the clear and present danger of worldliness.

### **Distinctiveness Lost**

Author James Hunter observes that we've "lost a measure of clarity" when it comes to how we relate to the world. He explains:

Evangelicals still adhere to prohibitions against premarital, extramarital, and homosexual relations. But even here, the attitude toward those prohibitions has noticeably softened.

This softening, he points out, brings an inevitable result:

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Many of the distinctions separating Christian conduct from “worldly conduct” have been challenged if not altogether undermined. Even the words *worldly* and *worldliness* have, within a generation, lost most of their traditional meaning.<sup>1</sup>

We’ve softened. We’ve lost clarity. Within a generation, *worldly* and *worldliness* have lost most of their meaning, becoming mere clippings on the floor of our lives. The distinctions between Christian and worldly conduct—once so clear—have blurred beyond recognition. The slippery slope from drifter to deserter has, in only a few years, grown increasingly slick. This rapid loss of clarity has culminated in crisis.

Today, the greatest challenge facing American evangelicals is not persecution from the world, but seduction by the world.

Unlike so many of our Christian brothers and sisters who live in countries with oppressive regimes—where the church is flourishing, by the way—we in America don’t face imminent threat to our families, livelihoods, and well-being for professing faith in Christ. Our peril is far more obscure and far more insidious. We aren’t under attack from without; we’re decaying from within. Our success as ambassadors for Christ, as witnesses of the life-changing power of the gospel, hangs in the balance.

We’ve let down our guard against worldliness. And as a love for the things of this world has infiltrated the church, it has watered down and weakened our witness. It threatens to silence our clarion call for repentance and faith in the Savior.

### Is This Verse in Your Bible?

Charles Spurgeon, writing 150 years ago, nevertheless speaks poignantly to the problem in the church today: “I believe,” he asserted, “that one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church.”<sup>2</sup>

Further substantiating his claim, he calls history as a witness:

Put your finger on any prosperous page in the Church’s history, and I will find a little marginal note reading thus: “In this age men could readily see where the Church began and where the world ended.” Never were there good times when the Church and the world were joined in marriage with one another. The more the Church is distinct from the world in her acts and in her maxims, the more true is her testimony for Christ, and the more potent is her witness against sin.<sup>3</sup>

The greater our difference from the world, the more true our testimony for Christ—and the more potent our witness against sin. But sadly, today, there’s not much difference. The lines have blurred. The lack of clarity between the church and the world has undercut our testimony for Christ and undermined our witness against sin. In Spurgeon’s words once again: “Worldliness is growing over the church; she is mossed with it.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Is There a Difference?**

Are the lines between Christian and worldly conduct blurry in your mind—and more importantly, in your life? To put it

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another way, is your lifestyle obviously different from that of the non-Christian?

Imagine I take a blind test in which my task is to identify the genuine follower of Jesus Christ. My choices are an unregenerate individual and you.

I'm given two reports detailing conversations, Internet activity, manner of dress, iPod playlists, television habits, hobbies, leisure time, financial transactions, thoughts, passions, and dreams.

The question is: Would I be able to tell you apart? Would I discern a difference between you and your unconverted neighbor, coworker, classmate, or friend?

Have the lines between Christian and worldly conduct in your life become so indistinguishable that there really is no difference at all?

If the difference is hard to detect, you may be in danger of drifting down the deserter's path with Demas.

In front of the deserter's path is a warning sign. It's 1 John 2:15: "Do not love the world or anything in the world."

This little book is a call to heed that warning. It's a passionate plea to a generation for whom the dangers of worldliness are perhaps more perilous than for any that has gone before.

But 1 John 2:15 isn't simply a "Do Not Enter" sign. These ten words (and the verses that follow) don't simply forbid worldliness, leaving us confused and unsure of where to go. They point the way to life in Christ. They help us see the pathway to what John Newton called "solid joys and lasting treasures."<sup>5</sup>

To understand this verse, you must first understand the

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nature of warnings. They're not legalistic restrictions from an irritated God who doesn't want us to enjoy ourselves. And they aren't relics of a bygone era, irrelevant for us today. No, warnings are expressions of God's mercy and wisdom. They're given for our good, to protect us from sin and its consequences.

So let's ignore this warning no longer. Let's paste our Bibles back together and receive from God his wisdom and mercy found in 1 John 2:15.

### **Do Not Love the *What?***

First, let me be clear. The author of this book, John, is not calling for some kind of monastic separation from the world.

The "world" of 1 John 2:15 doesn't refer to the created order or to the blessings that come from living in a modern society, such as modern conveniences or medical and scientific advances. For God created the world and declared it "very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Nor does this verse refer to economic and social structures of society—our family, friends, vocation, field of study, government, or community. All of these are ordained by our heavenly Father. As David says, "The earth is the LORD'S and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1).

And of course, we're supposed to love all men—not only our brothers and sisters in Christ but also those who are not Christians—because "God so loved the world" that he gave his Son (John 3:16). In fact, true love for God is demonstrated by a growing passion to tell others about his love. (That's why my good friend Jeff Purswell will conclude this book with a

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chapter on how to rightly love the world. Sound paradoxical? Keep reading to find out why it's anything but.)

So what is the “world” we are forbidden to love?

The world we're not to love is *the organized system of human civilization that is actively hostile to God and alienated from God*. The world God forbids us to love is the fallen world. Humanity at enmity with God. A world of arrogant, self-sufficient people seeking to exist apart from God and living in opposition to God. It's a world richly deserving of the righteous wrath of a holy God. Dead set against the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the world we're forbidden to love.

While remaining *in* the world, we're not to become *like* the world. In the words of John Stott, we must be “neither conformed to [the world] nor contaminated by it.”<sup>6</sup> But this sinful, fallen world is right in our face. Our affluent and technologically advanced society brings the world to our doorstep, into our homes, into our very presence. It baits our eyes and tickles our ears. We're saturated with media—bombarDED by images on television and movie screens, and by music on our iPods. We have unlimited access—text messages on our cell phones, and Internet access on our laptops and hand-held devices. We enjoy countless options in clothes to wear, cars to buy, vacations to take, entertainment to view, music to listen to.

And obviously, while these things are not inherently evil, so often they're vehicles of a fallen world. They deliver endless opportunities to pursue pleasure without regard to God and his Word, endless opportunities to be seduced by this fallen world, to succumb to the sin of worldliness.

Every moment of every day we're making choices—

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whether we realize it or not—between love for a world that opposes God and love for the risen Christ.

### **Defining Worldliness**

Worldliness, then, is a love for this fallen world. It's loving the values and pursuits of the world that stand opposed to God. More specifically, it is *to gratify and exalt oneself to the exclusion of God*. It rejects God's rule and replaces it with our own (like creating our own Bibles). It exalts our opinions above God's truth. It elevates our sinful desires for the things of this fallen world above God's commands and promises.

"The goal of worldly people," observes Joel Beeke,

is to move forward rather than upward, to live horizontally rather than vertically. They seek after outward prosperity rather than holiness. They burst with selfish desires rather than heartfelt supplications. If they do not deny God, they ignore and forget Him, or else they use Him only for their selfish ends. *Worldliness . . . is human nature without God.*<sup>7</sup>

Does that description sound familiar? Does it describe you?

What are your goals? Do they drive you *forward*—to financial security, more friends, successful kids, a certain position at work, learning a craft or trade? Or do they drive you *upward*—to obeying and glorifying God above all else? What gets you out of bed in the morning?

Try this: What dominates your mind and stirs your heart? Is it discontentment with your life? Longings for earthly pleasures? Does outward prosperity appeal to you more than growth in godliness? Or is your prayer life char-

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acterized by heartfelt supplications for God's will to be done and his kingdom to come?

Do you relate to God as if he exists to further your selfish ambitions or are you convinced that you exist to glorify him? Are you trying to live without God? Iain Murray describes this way of thinking:

Worldliness is departing from God. It is a man-centred way of thinking; it proposes objectives which demand no radical breach with man's fallen nature; it judges the importance of things by the present and material results; it weighs success by numbers; it covets human esteem and wants no unpopularity; it knows no truth for which it is worth suffering; it declines to be "a fool for Christ's sake". Worldliness is the mind-set of the unregenerate. It adopts idols and is at war with God.<sup>8</sup>

Do you covet the esteem and crave the approval of those around you? Do you go to great lengths to avoid looking foolish or being rejected for your Christian faith? Do you consider present and material results more important than eternal reward? Have you departed from God and adopted idols instead? *Are you at war with God?*

These are tough questions, I know; but they are necessary if you're to discover whether you have been infected with the disease of worldliness.

### The Root Issue

Mention worldliness, and you're sure to encounter opposing views among Christians. The conflict often reveals a wrong focus on externals.

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Some people try to define worldliness as living *outside* a specific set of rules or conservative standards. If you listen to music with a certain beat, dress in fashionable clothes, watch movies with a certain rating, or indulge in certain luxuries of modern society, surely you must be worldly.

Others, irritated and repulsed by rules that seem arbitrary, react to definitions of worldliness, assuming it's impossible to define. Or they think legalism will inevitably be the result, so we shouldn't even try.

Ready for a surprise? Both views are wrong. For by focusing exclusively on externals or dismissing the importance of externals, we've missed the point. John—inspired by the Holy Spirit—takes the debate to a whole other level.

He takes it inside.

For that's where worldliness is. It exists in our hearts. Worldliness does not consist in outward behavior, though our actions can certainly be an *evidence* of worldliness within. But the real location of worldliness is internal. It resides in our hearts.

We see this by looking closely at the verse that follows: "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" (1 John 2:16 NIV).

Notice that in enlarging upon what is "in the world," John doesn't say, "this particular mode of dress, this way of speaking, this music, these possessions." No, the essence of worldliness is in the *cravings* of sinful man, the *lust* of his eyes, and the *boasting* of what he has and does. "The 'worldly' characteristics of which this verse speaks," writes commenta-

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tor David Jackman, “are in fact reactions going on inside us, as we contemplate the environment outside.”<sup>9</sup>

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, John is wisely drawing our attention inside. The root issue is within. Before applying this discernment to the world around us, we must start with ourselves, for the root issue is internal, not environmental. We must learn to discern worldliness where it lurks—inside our hearts.

### When Cravings Compete

With the phrase “cravings of sinful man,” John is targeting our hearts. Although Christians have new hearts, remaining sin in our lives produces cravings that compete with God’s supremacy in our hearts.

David Powlison, paraphrasing John Calvin, wrote, “The evil in our desires often lies not in what we want, but in the fact that we want it too much.”<sup>10</sup> It’s difficult to improve upon this insight. The “cravings of sinful man” are legitimate desires that have become false gods we worship. It’s wanting too much the things of this fallen world.

A sinful craving is when a legitimate desire for financial success becomes a silent *demand* for financial success; an interest in clothes and fashion becomes a *preoccupation*; love of music morphs into an *obsession* with the hottest band; or the desire to enjoy a good movie becomes a *need* to see the latest blockbuster.

There may be nothing wrong with these desires in and of themselves; but when they dominate the landscape of our lives—when we *must* have them or else!—we’ve succumbed to idolatry and worldliness. And as Calvin says, our hearts

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are a perpetual factory of idols.<sup>11</sup> We're pumping out these things on a regular basis.

Or take John's next phrase, "the lust of his eyes." Our hearts may generate sinful cravings, but they can also be aroused by what we see. The eyes themselves are a precious gift from God. But they're also windows into our soul, providing opportunities for us not simply to observe but to covet. Please don't limit this to sexual sin; practically anything we see can stimulate greed in our souls.

So what are you captivated by? Really, what do you think about most often, what images have the power to arouse your interest? It's probably whatever is coming to mind right now. And we must ask ourselves, what value does it have?

If you're more excited about the release of a new movie or video game than about serving in the local church, if you're drawn to people more because of their physical attractiveness or personality than their character, if you're impressed by Hollywood stars or professional athletes regardless of their lack of integrity or morality, then you've been seduced by this fallen world.

And finally, "the boasting of what he has and does." We're all so familiar with this temptation, are we not? We find ourselves so easily tempted to take pride in our work, our talents or abilities, our physical appearance, possessions, or accomplishments.

We might be too polite to boast aloud, but secretly we revel in what we have and what we've done. We think we're significant because of our assets and achievements, and we want others to notice. How do you define yourself? How does your profile read? How do you want to be known?

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Do you think of yourself as “the guy with the impressive title” or “the most attractive girl in the room”? Are you the person with the Ivy-League education or the fancy car or the beautifully decorated home? Is your hobby or talent or career the most important thing about you? Or is it even your spouse or your kids—their successes and accomplishments?

We must not define ourselves by, or boast in, anything we possess or accomplish in this world. Instead we should identify with Christ and his definition of greatness: the humble, the servant.

The cravings of sinful man . . . the lust of his eyes . . . the boasting of what he has and does. We don't often identify these root issues of the sin of worldliness. And once again, *clip, clip, clip*—1 John 2:15 is left out of “our” version of the Bible.

## Where There Is No Future

After highlighting the godlessness of the things of the world, John then exposes their futility: “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:17 NIV). The verse is clear: these things don't last. They pass away.

My friend, I don't want you to waste your life pursuing things that won't last. I don't want you to have what John Owen describes as “living affections to dying things.”<sup>12</sup>

There's no future in worldliness. None. This world is temporary and superficial, and it doesn't satisfy. Oh, I know, the world sparkles, the world dazzles. I know because I've been there. I immersed myself in the world. I passionately pursued everything it had to offer. And what did I discover? It didn't

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deliver as advertised. It deceived me. What it did deliver were unadvertised consequences I wasn't informed of and didn't anticipate. For sin carries with it the seeds of dissatisfaction and destruction.

The things of this world—when compared to pleasing God and eternal life, when informed by an eternal perspective—will be exposed as being worthless. But there is a future in godliness, and for all who do the will of God. They, by contrast, will live forever.

### **What Matters Most**

How about you? Which will you choose? Will you pursue the deceptive, temporary pleasures of worldliness? Or do the will of God, which contains the promise of eternal life?

Maybe, as you read this chapter, you realize you're drifting. Or maybe you're in headlong pursuit of worldliness. You may realize your affection for the things of this world is strong, your love for Christ weak.

And you feel trapped, entangled in the net of worldliness. Despair sets in. Condemnation comes to call. *You'll never change. You'll never be able to give up the things of the world you love so much. You might as well not even try. You're beyond hope.*

Yes, resisting worldliness requires strenuous effort. It's an inside problem and hard heart-work will be needed to effectively cut it out. And it's a lifelong battle. We must resist its influence until our dying breath.

However, this isn't a battle fought by sheer willpower or teeth-gritting self-denial. We can't overcome worldliness on

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our own. We are not sufficient. A much greater strength is required.

But take heart! All that we need to overcome worldliness has been provided for us.

The antidote to worldliness is the cross of Jesus Christ.

*Only through the power of the cross of Christ can we successfully resist the seduction of the fallen world.* The Savior's death on the cross is what makes possible forgiveness of sin and provides power to overcome sin. And the cross is the attraction that draws our hearts away from the empty and deadly pleasures of worldliness.

If you want to begin immediately to weaken the influence of worldliness in your life, take the sound advice from that great physician of the soul, John Owen:

When someone sets his affections upon the cross and the love of Christ, he crucifies the world as a dead and undesirable thing. The baits of sin lose their attraction and disappear. Fill your affections with the cross of Christ and you will find no room for sin.<sup>13</sup>

Do you want the world to lose its appeal? Then crowd out worldliness by filling your affections with the cross of Christ. Crucify the world as a dead and undesirable thing by meditating on the love of the Savior. Resist the bait of the world by gazing at the wondrous cross. For it is "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," wrote Paul, "by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

Charles Spurgeon urged us to "dwell where the cries of Calvary can be heard."<sup>14</sup> If we will do this, then the things

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of this world will indeed “grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”<sup>15</sup>

What should consume our thoughts and affections is not resisting worldliness but the glory and grace of God revealed at the cross. We must take the sin of worldliness seriously, to be sure; that’s why we wrote this book. But its eradication is not an end in itself. Resisting worldliness is absolutely vital but not ultimately most significant.

*Jesus Christ* is most important. We must fight worldliness because it dulls our affections for Christ and distracts our attention from Christ. Worldliness is so serious because Christ is so glorious.

While resisting worldliness is this book’s theme, exalting Christ is its aim. That’s why I’ve closed this chapter, and why we’ll eventually close this book, surveying the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died.

Meditate on the cross. Consider the wonders of the Savior who died for sinners and rose victorious over sin and death. Dwell where the cries of Calvary are louder than the clamor of the world.