1 John 2:15–17 Do not love the world

1. Introduction

a. What is your worldview? A worldview is a way of looking at and explaining life and the world. It serves as a lens through which the world is interpreted. It is a set of beliefs that influences a person's perspective, values and actions.

   i To simplify that, it's how we look at the world in order to make sense of it. It is important that we have a worldview, and that we know what that worldview is.

   ii Most of us, whether we are conscious of it or not, would say that the way we view the world is through the lens of the scriptures. They inform us of God's perspective of the world and give us insight into how to navigate our way through the pressures of our personal involvement in a society and culture that is increasingly hostile to his involvement and his ways.

b. Today I want us to discover and understand John's worldview that he presents us with in his New Testament writings, and then look at how he applies this in 1 John.

2. *Kosmos* – an out-of-this-world experience

a. The word that we are going to explore in depth this morning is the Greek word "***kosmos***." The English word "cosmos" is generally a reference to the entire universe, whereas the Greek word ***kosmos*** in the bible is mostly translated as "world." But because of the different meanings that the Greek ***kosmos*** has undergone, the context of each usage can inflect a different shade of meaning, all of which help contribute to an understanding of the writer's worldview.

b. In the process we're going to learn some very practical and helpful insights about the world from the scriptures. The commonest way that Greek ***kosmos*** is translated in our bibles is with the word "world." But that's a word that has many different meanings in the English language. It's important that we understand what the writers of scripture themselves understood what was meant by this word.

c. The New Testament writers generally wrote in the common Hellenistic Greek that had been around for over 1500 years, so they were using the same language as the ancient Greek poets and philosophers such as Homer, Hippocrates, Pythagoras, Plato etc. So they used words and phrases that everyday people would understand.

d. The earliest use of the word ***kosmos*** is not focused on the physical universe, but it is simply about order; used, for instance, to describe the order in which the rowers in a Greek galley would sit. Hippocrates used the word to describe the natural order, and the philosophers began using the word to describe the cosmic order, or the order of things beyond the natural, including the spiritual. ***Kosmos*** then became used to describe the universe, understood as the total world because of the order it exhibited.

e. At this time the principal understanding of ***kosmos*** was that it consisted of heaven and earth. The worldview of the people would have been heavily influenced by the Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, Epicurus and Archimedes. To them the ***kosmos*** had earth at the centre of the universe,

from which all time and space flowed. And this is the secular view of the composition of the universe that dominated Western thought for the next 1800 years until Copernicus.

f. This was the philosophical understanding that the New Testament writers were addressing, bringing light into the darkness of this secular human thinking. Their worldview would have put God at the centre of the ***kosmos***.

g. How did the Old Testament writers view the universe?" There is no equivalent word in Hebrew, and so they employed the standard phrase "the heavens and the earth" instead. Even in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures the word ***kosmos*** is rarely used.

Genesis 2:1 *Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host [kosmos] of them.*

i The word is used for the "hosts" of heaven, referring to the earth, sun, moon, stars and all the components of the universe laid out in order – thus retaining the original idea of the order of things.

3. *Kosmos* in the New Testament

a. In the New Testament ***kosmos*** occurs 185 times, and of those John uses it 105 times. John had a good understanding of how as disciples of Jesus we should interact with the world, and how God views the world. Almost exclusively ***kosmos*** in the New Testament is translated in our bibles as "world" in some sense. It's important that we understand just what the writers are referring to when they use this word.

b. Firstly, many passages emphasise that the ***kosmos*** is established or created by God, and thus has a beginning:

Ephesians 1:4 *…even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the **world** [kosmos], that we should be holy and blameless before him.*

1 Peter 1:20 *He was foreknown before the foundation of the **world** [kosmos] but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you…*

c. Secondly, there are some passages that are focused on the world as the place of human habitation or the nations of the world:

Romans 1:8 *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the **world** [kosmos].*

Mark 14:9 *And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole **world** [kosmos], what she has done will be told in memory of her.*

Luke 12:30 *For all the nations of the **world** [kosmos] seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.*

d. Thirdly, it is also used to refer to earthly possessions and values, or attributes such as power, prestige, influence and wealth. In these passages the writers are addressing the comprehensive system of world values and character qualities, contrasting godly values with those of the world:

Matthew 16:26 *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole **world** [kosmos] and forfeit his soul?*

1 Corinthians 1:20 *Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the* ***world****? [kosmos]*

James 4:4 *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the* ***world*** *[kosmos] is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the* ***world*** *[kosmos] makes himself an enemy of God.*

e. So the New Testament writers used the word ***kosmos*** in different ways in order to convey different meanings, so we need to look at the context in which they are used in order to determine what was in the mind of the writer.

4. John's use of *kosmos* in his gospel

a. John also uses ***kosmos*** in the same ways as the other New Testament writers. For instance, he, too, uses the word to speak of Jesus before the creation of the world:

John 17:5 *And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the* ***world*** *[kosmos] existed.*

i Here John is speaking of the totality of the world, the entire created order, which he understood to be morally neutral.

b. He also uses ***kosmos*** to speak of the humanitarian world, the world of people, and especially people who need the revelation of God:

John 1:9-10 *The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the* ***world*** *[kosmos]. [10] He was in the* ***world*** *[kosmos], and the* ***world*** *was made through him, yet the* ***world*** *did not know him.*

i In his gospel John outlines Jesus' pre-existence with God from the beginning and his involvement in the creation. He speaks of Jesus coming into the world in two ways: first he came in a physical body to the physical world; then he came and dwelt among men, and it was this world of humanity that did not know him.

c. It's this element of the lostness of humanity that John picks up in John 3:16

John 3:16 *For God so loved the* **world** *[kosmos], that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

i This is the world of humanity in its lost condition, and therefore needs a solution. It's a theme that is woven throughout his gospel.

ii Although we apply this verse in the personal sense, in the first phrase we can see something more. One of the original meanings of kosmos was the universe, the whole of the physical creation. At the fall when Adam sinned, all of the created order was placed into a state of bondage; Paul's teaching in Romans tells us that creation groans, waiting to be released from that bondage.

iii When God created all of those things he declared them to be good, so God loves the totality of his creation. Jesus came not only to save mankind from their sin, but also to deliver the creation out of its state of bondage and into the glorious freedom that God originally intended. When this verse says that God so loved the ***kosmos*** that he gave his only son, he is not just talking about the salvation of mankind, but the restoration of all things through Jesus.

d. John speaks of the ***kosmos*** as being in opposition to God, lost humanity characterised and identified by people loving darkness rather than light. Sometimes the opposition of the world is emphasized by the inclusion of the qualifier "this":

   i John 9:39 Jesus came "into ***this*** world";

   ii John 13:1 Jesus was about to pass over from "***this*** world" to the Father

   iii John 12:31 and 16:11 the ruler of "***this*** world" has been judged

   iv John 18:36 Jesus told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of ***this*** world."

e. As we read John's gospel and note how he speaks about the world, we begin to understand John's worldview and how he expresses it through his writings. To John, ultimately the ***kosmos*** represents the world of humanity as lost, alienated and separated from its Creator and in opposition to him, under the control of the Enemy and to be overcome by the Christian just as it was overcome by Jesus himself.

John 16:33 *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the **world** [kosmos] you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the **world**.*

5. Do not love the world

1 John 2:15-17 *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 all that is in the **world**---the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions---is not from the Father but is from the **world**. [17] And the **world** is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

a. The issue of worldliness has been a problem for those who seek to follow Jesus down through the centuries. The danger of becoming enveloped in the culture of the day so as to appear relevant is very real, and where the church, instead of being salt and light in the culture, blends on so much that it loses its distinctiveness.

Romans 12:2 *"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your lives from within." [J.B.Philips paraphrased version]*

b. The pull of the world on us is greater now than it has ever been. Daily we are lured by people telling us we can't be happy unless we have the latest, shiniest gadget, or adopt this or that lifestyle.

c. To be worldly is to operate on the same principles as unregenerate people, thinking and acting out of selfishness, greed, pride, and personal ambition. Rather than living to please God, who examines the heart, the worldly person tries to impress people, who look on things outwardly.

d. John begins with a command, "*Do not love the world or the things of the world*." Everything else is either an argument as to why we should not love the world. The first argument John gives is that "*if anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him"* (v15). Love for the world pushes out love for God, and love for God pushes out love for the world.

   i Jesus said something similar when he said that you can't serve two masters, when speaking about our approach to God and money. If you love one, it is impossible to love the other. Either you love the world or you love the Father, but you can't do both. The Father is a jealous lover who deserves and demands total allegiance.

e. John then gives some support and explanation of his first incentive. The reason love for the world pushes out love for God is that "*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*." Leave out those three phrases in the middle of verse 16 and it would read like this: the reason love for the world excludes love for God is that all that is in the world is not of God.

f. What is this world that we are not to love? It is characterised by these three things: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Thomas Constable's definition is most helpful:

   i **Lust of the flesh** – the desire to ***do*** something apart from the will of God. This mainly appeals to the body and to physical sensation, and is most commonly expressed in things like illicit sex, hedonism and the idolisation of pleasure.

   ii **Lust of the eyes** – the desire to ***have*** something apart from the will of God. This mainly appeals to the soul, and is manifested in an elevated pursuit of materialism and the acquisition of possessions, as well as physical appearance.

   iii **Pride of life** – the desire to ***be*** something apart from the will of God. This mainly appeals to the spirit in the form of control through personality, egoism and social or political power.

g. There are two classes of pleasure — physical and aesthetic. There is the lust of the flesh — bodily pleasures; and the lust of the eyes — aesthetic and intellectual pleasures.

h. The lust of the flesh encompasses any strong desire originating from our fallen nature, the self-seeking, godless nature that we are born with. But is it wrong to have any kind of desire? Like a good meal, or some new clothes?

   i Many natural desires are legitimate if they are kept under control and used in the sphere for which God designed them. Desire for food, companionship, sex, and security are legitimate when we keep them within God's limits and do not allow them to usurp His rightful place in our hearts. They become sinful when we seek to fulfil them in selfish or ungodly ways.

i. The lust of the eyes points to the sinful desires of greed and covetousness, or desires that stem from false, superficial values. Through our eyes, the world appeals to us to find satisfaction in the superficial, which never can satisfy.

j. The lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes are the desire to have what you don't have, but the pride of life refers to sinful pride over what you do have. It is the desire to be better than others so that you can glory in yourself and your accomplishments – gifting, ability or achievement — the things you have in yourself.

k. These things do not come from the Father, but are symptomatic of friendship with the world. The world's pleasures are false and deceptive. Its riches, rank, and honours, have no power to satisfy the heart.

   i To sum up these three pitfalls, anything in this world that is not of God can rob your heart of the love of God. Anything that is not of God can draw your heart away from God. If you don't have it, it can fill you with a passion to get it. And then if you get it, it can fill you with pride that you've got it.

6. The world is passing away

1 John 2:17 *And the **world** is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

a. What does the world is passing away mean? Nobody buys stock in a company that is going bankrupt. Nobody builds a house on a flood-plain. If you have some treasure you wouldn't store it somewhere where moth and rust can destroy it, or where thieves could break and steal it.

b. Not only is the world passing away, but its desires are going with it. If you share the desires of the world, you will pass away, you will not only lose your treasure, you will lose your life. If you love the world, it will pass away and take you with it. Although the world itself has a glorious future, the system that it runs on right now, its values and everything that it seeks to promote in the human heart in the fullness of its pride will be utterly destroyed, and many will perish with it.

c. Spurgeon has this to say on these verses: "*This world is fading away! Hate the world, value its treasure at a cheap price, estimate its gems as nothing but fakes, and its strength as nothing but dreams. Do not think that you will lose any pleasure, but rather remember the saying of that early Church leader Chrysostom … "Despise riches, and you will be rich; despise glory, and you will be glorious; despise injuries, and you will be a conqueror; despise rest, and you will gain rest; despise the earth, and you will gain heaven!*"*"*

d. The opposite of loving the world is not only loving the Father (v15), but also doing the will of the Father (v17). Love for God will always result in obedience to God. If you truly love God you will also love what he wills, and you will come to value the desires he has for you in your life.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that for **those who love God** all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

1 Corinthians 2:9 *"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for **those who love him**"*

***James 2:5** …has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to **those who love him**?*

e. Loving the Father and freeing ourselves from the love of the world is not optional. It is a matter of eternal life or eternal death. Nothing in all the world is more important than experiencing love for God in your heart. This love for God is the first and great commandment.

7. Conclusion

a. There is much in this world that is to be loved. There is still much beauty in the world even in its fallen state. it was painted by a loving God who wants to share his pleasure with his creation. And if what we see today is the landscape of a world that is marred by bondage and futility because of the brokenness and sinfulness of man, what will it be like when the new heaven and the new earth are revealed at the end of the age, when Jesus returns to carry out the restoration of all things?