

“Assured Because of Your Love of the Father” // 1 John 2:15–17; 5:20–21 // *Assured*, Message #4

Announcement:

Today we kick-off a season prayer--a season of posturing our hearts and crying out to God for 40 days in anticipation of Easter (our version of LENT). There are a couple of ways I want you to participate:

First, don't miss this Monday night's "Night of Worship and Prayer."

- We only gather together as one church a couple of times a year, and this night is one of them. It's going to be a great opportunity to experience the power of God's presence together as one church at the Brier Creek Campus at 6:30.
- We've got a great night planned led by Summit Worship pastors and leaders from every campus. This corporate gathering will be a monument to an encounter with the living God, as well as a catalyst for his work in your everyday life, your family, and your community. Spread the word. Bring your friends, your family, and your small group.

Also, over the next few weeks, we'll be equipping you with resources and tools to help you in your prayer time. One of those tools is **this prayer guide**.

- Inside it, you'll find a step by step guide for your personal prayer time as well as a guide for your small group study.
- It's available at the **Next Step Area** at your campus to purchase today. This guide will also be available on **The City** as a free download.
- **Pray with friends.**
- And check this out—my favorite thing about this guide—it's is our first fully bilingual resource. As you pray and study with your small group throughout these 40 days, Summit people from our Summit en Espanol campus will be praying and engaging in small group discussion right alongside you. I love that we are one church meeting in 6 locations...AND 2 languages.

Before we start our message today, let's pause and pray together:

Introduction:

1 John 2: *Week #4 in this series called ASSURED...* My purpose in this series has been to help you find the assurance of salvation, for a couple of reasons:

1. I am concerned about a lot of people, even here in our church, who tell me they are assured of their salvation because they prayed a prayer that somebody told them would guarantee them heaven if they did it: they went through some ritual; invited Jesus into their heart; or got baptized or confirmed or whatever... but the Bible never says that a praying a prayer saves you. There is only one way to be saved: and that is to have a genuine, personal relationship with God that begins with repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ. And I want to make sure that you understand what those things are and have actually done them.

2. The other reason I want to help you find assurance is because I know your spiritual life will never take off until you have assurance of where you stand with God. Assurance is the fuel for everything else in the Christian life.

- How will you ever risk it all if you're not sure God is yours?
- The **established church** of Martin Luther's day believed that people would only obey when they were threatened with harsh consequences for rebellion.
- Martin Luther called this the "**damnable doctrine of doubt.**"¹ He said, **yes, being afraid of judgment** will produce a surface-level adherence, he said, but underneath that thin veneer of obedience will rush a river of fear, pride, and self-interest. The only way to develop real love for God is to have fear removed.
- Love for God, he says, grows only in the assurance of the love of God.

God loves us and wants us to know. Throughout 1st John, and as you'll see today, John refers to believers as "little children."

- I told you the first week... A **good father** does want his kids wondering whether or not he loves them or he is committed to them.
- **When I go away** on a trip, I don't say to my kids, "*Daddy will be back soon... or maybe he won't. Maybe he's not really your daddy*"

¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535: Chapters 1–4*, LW 26. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1963. "I am saying this in order to refute the **dangerous doctrine** (*perniciosa doctrina*, or "*damnable doctrine*") of the *sophists and the monks*, who taught and believed that no one can know for a certainty whether he is in a state of grace, even if he does good works according to his ability and lives a blameless life... *This wicked idea, on which the entire kingdom of the pope rests, is one that you young people should flee and regard with horror as a dangerous plague.*" (LW 26:377. Emphasis added.) Also, "*Let us thank God, therefore, that we have been delivered from this monster of uncertainty* (*hoc monstro incertitudinis*) and that now we can believe for a certainty that the Holy Spirit is crying and issuing that sigh too deep for words in our hearts. And this is our foundation: The Gospel commands us to look, not at our own good deeds or perfections but at God Himself as He promises, and at Christ Himself, the Mediator. By contrast the pope commands us to look, not at God as He promises, not at Christ our High Priest, but at our own works and merits. From the latter course, doubt and despair necessarily follow; but from the former, certainty and the joy of the Spirit." (LW 26:386–387. Emphasis added.)

at all. Maybe my real family lives somewhere else. You'll just have to wait and see if I come back. I might return from this trip with a gift for you, or I might not return at all. Sit around and think about that while I'm gone, and let that compel you to become better children."

- **That would not produce love** and loyalty in my children. It might produce a little **fear-based obedience**, but it's only a matter of time until fear-based obedience turns into **father-loathing rebellion**.
- You have a Father that...
- **If I don't want** my own children feeling like orphans, would God, who is the best father, want his kids fearing that they might be orphans?

1 John gives you a series of ways of knowing you are saved: tests, i you will, that show if your experience with God is genuine, and today we come to one that is so fundamental, so foundational, that if this one is not true of you then there is something seriously wrong down in your heart and it might indicate that though you've been in church and thought of yourself as religious you've not had a genuine experience with God.

1 John 2:15–16

[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 all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

First, let me note the confusing nature of this verse... "Do not love the world."²

² Cosmos: This word shows up 185 times in the New Testament, and more than half of those mentions come from John. Still, even John's use of the term cosmos ("world") is not uniform. 1. Sometimes it refers to what we would call the natural world, that is, the place we as humans live, composed of matter—as opposed to heaven (3:17; 4:1, 4, 9, 17). This is usually mentioned neutrally. 2. John periodically uses cosmos to refer to all of the people of the world, as in John 3:16 (or 1 John 2:2). This is mentioned in a positive light. 3. John also uses this term to refer to the unbelieving world, those opposed to God and under the power of the evil one (3:1, 13; 4:5; 5:19). These are patently negative references that would correspond most to Paul's use of the term "flesh." 4. The last way

- If you've been around here, you might say: Isn't the Summit's mission statement: *Love God; Love Each Other; Love the World?*
- And how about verses like **John 3:16**? (By the way—John 3:16; 1 John 2:15) those are written by the SAME author! Is John schizo?) I hate you then I love you...

So let's first talk about what this statement does NOT mean.³ He's not saying Christians should not love...

- **The created order.**
 - As in Christians hate earthly pleasures and only love spiritual things. We think about heaven as sitting on a cloud somewhere in diapers strumming a harp.
 - Some Christians think that, that if you love God you are an **ascetic** who doesn't enjoy material blessings.
 - But God created the world and looked at his creation (things like nature and beauty and food and comfort) and said: ***This is good!*** When **Jesus was here** that called him a glutton and a drinker of fine wine which meant that he knew how to enjoy a good meal.
 - So it glorifies God when you enjoy great music or an Angus Barn steak. That's why he created it. (Amen? I'm getting hungry.)
- **To "love not the world" doesn't mean you hate the economic and social structures of society:** as in—"if you're a Christian you hate all government or big business or the music industry or Hollywood just as a matter of principle. I've known a lot of Christians who thought that, so we were taught not to go into secular professions like business or politics but to start business ones.
- **"Love not the world" doesn't mean that you hate culture**

that John uses the term is related to #3, but slightly different. It is less about the unbelievers in the world and more about worldly values that are opposed to God (2:15-17; 5:4, 5). Obviously, unbelievers will be characterized by these things, but it's still a distinct definition.

³ Some of these are taken from C.J. Mahaney's *Worldliness*, p. 25. When he says, "Do not love the world," John is talking about (using the words of C.J. Mahaney) "*the organized system of human civilization that is actively hostile to God and alienated from God.*" *Worldliness*, 26.

- When I grew up this verse was often interpreted to mean you shouldn't listen to rock music, because rock music was 'worldly.' Even if you put Christian words to it. It was the devil's music. The devil owns the drumset. Christian rock was like serving a **T-Bone steak on a plate of manure.** *I was told, "there ought to be a difference."* *Jesus likes Southern Gospel.*
 - Plus, when you play rock music next to flower the flower grows away from it.
- We had to avoid **worldly dress styles.** Christian guys wore ties; have short hair, no beards and never ever get tattooed or pierced.
 - We even had a song: If **your hair's too long**, there's sin in your heart... (You can't make that up!)
- Girls, believe it or not, had it worse: they had to wear those **denim jumpers and culottes.** A friend of mine got expelled from our school because her bathing suit had a hole in the knee.
- But Christians were supposed to **look different.**
- That's not what it means here.
- **It doesn't mean you hate the people of the world.**
 - Sadly, I've known some "Christians" who felt they were being godly when they expressed their hatred or disgust toward non-Christians.
 - **John 3:16-17.**

So what is it?

- ***When John says, "Do not love the world," he means the world as it is arrayed in rebellion against God.*** He defines his own meaning in the next verse: "**...for all that is in the world, the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world.**" (2:16)⁴

⁴ Epithymia: Unsurprisingly, the term epithymia ("desire") nearly always has a negative connotation in Scripture. There are a few exceptions (cf. Phil 1:23: "My desire is to be with Christ . . ."), but it can almost always be understood as "sinful desire." But which kind of evil desire? Over-desire, or just desiring bad stuff? John doesn't help us out any, since 1 John 2:16-17 is the only time John uses the word. But throughout the NT,

- **“Lust”: epithymia:** (very important word) which means a desire that has taken on too much weight; a craving that has taken on such **weight** in your life that it controls you.
 - **The lusts of the flesh**
 - That’s when some good thing God has created becomes *so important to you either feel like you couldn’t be happy without it or it takes on such an important role in your life you are willing to disobey the laws of God to get it.*
 - Let’s take **the example of sex:** Sex is a good creation of God, and ought to be greatly enjoyed—in the way God designed it to be enjoyed. But when you say, “I want to have it regardless of whether or not I do it according to God’s designs,” that is “worldly.” When you treat it like an ultimate thing; that is worldly.
 - **We have a cultural obsession with sex, do we not?**
 - **Sex is used to sell everything:**
 - Watching the Superbowl the other night I could not figure out what in the world sex had to do with GoDaddy.
 - I’ve told you before it seems like every magazine in the Supermarket rack has on the cover “10 ways to drive your man wild,” “30 ways to shake your bed across the floor.” Even magazines that have nothing to do with romance, like *Field and Stream*: “How to get your girl in the blind.” *Allie at Walmart*
 - The way **our culture teaches girls** to dress, so that it highlights their sexuality, and flaunts their sexuality. Listen, I have 3 daughters and I know it’s coming. “Oh, it’s just fashionable.” Yes, it’s in the fashion of the world and if you’re going to follow Jesus you’re going to have to be willing, sometimes, **to be unfashionable.**
 - What **Beyonce did on the stage** the other night for halftime at the Superbowl was a **feast for the lusts of the flesh.** I know she is talented. My wife was super excited about her doing the halftime show... after it was over we both looked at each other and said, “We should have turned that off...” Because it was all built to cater to the lusts of the flesh.
 - **The lusts of the eyes**
 - That’s when you see something good in the world that becomes so important to you that *you feel like you can’t be happy without that thing; LIKE MONEY: and you’re jealous of those, or you resent those, who have it and you don’t; or you make unwise decisions to obtain those things.*
 - As in, you **put yourself in a bad financial situation** where you go into debt.
 - You **overwork Proverbs 23:4, “Do not overwork to acquire wealth; be wise enough to desist!”**
 - Or you **don’t tithe** and give generously. If you are in a place where you can’t afford to be generous, you might ask whether you have succumbed to the “lust of the eyes.”
 - Or you can’t give up something God is telling you to give up...
 - Or you save so much you won’t be generous—and give 10% of your income away to the work of God.
 - **The pride of life**

epithymia seems to be flexible enough to cover both. Galatians 5:16 f., for instance, mentions the desires of the flesh, and Paul starts his list of patently negative things. But look at what’s in the middle of the list: idolatry. And a lot of the other things he mentions are good things taken out of proportion: drunkenness takes alcohol (good) to excess; sexual immorality takes sexuality (good) in the wrong context; rivalries take a good thing (loyalty) and makes it ultimate. The commentators seem to want to fuse these two ideas, too. There isn’t such a thing as a desire that is purely evil, just ones that are too important to us, too central to our happiness, or too skewed to cohere with love of the Father.

- That's when your wealth or accomplishments in life become something **you take pride in, or boast in.**
- That can happen **in a couple of ways:** 1. Your accomplishments make you think you are better than others. Look at what I've gotten or what I've done. This or that sets me apart. *You want others to notice your distinctiveness in it.*
 - Forgetting, of course, that everything you've ever done or have is the result of gifts given to you.
 - ~~You say, "Not me, I started with nothing and worked hard." Yes, but first of all, you didn't start with nothing. You had some talent and an opportunity, and the drive to turn yourself into something was a gift. Not everyone got that drive.~~
- 2. The other way you can boast is to assume that these things make your life so stable that you have nothing to worry about. "I'll be fine—I have **money in the bank account.**" "I'll be fine—**people like me.**" "I'll be fine—I'm **so talented** I can always make something happen.
- The "pride of life" is when your confidence in the future has more to do with something about yourself rather than God.
- **Think, right now: what makes you feel confident about the future?**
- John says, "Don't be consumed with these things." Because if your life is consumed with those things, it shows that the love of the Father is not in your life. God has been displaced.
 - **Epithumia** is when something good has taken on so much weight it is ultimate.
 - **Kabod**
- Let me prove to you this is what he's trying to say. Turn to the last verse in the book of 1 John. An odd verse. **[5:21] Little children, keep yourselves from idols.**
 - Now, sometimes people are confused by this verse—even a lot of Bible commentators, because John has not used the word "idol" in the book of 1 John and it looks like he is introducing a completely new concept at the end—a little postscript that has nothing to do with his book. Like ending a sermon with "Go Heels."
 - But the other way you could look at it is that that verse summarized everything else John was teaching in 1 John.
 - Which is how I see it.
- The **essence of conversion** is that God becomes God to you again. You **cease putting ultimate weight** on the lusts of the flesh and the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life and **God's glory takes on the most weight** in your heart. The **essence of sin is false worship. Repentance is beginning to worship God** as God again.
- **Has that happened to you?** *I know that many of you prayed a prayer, but did you actually repent of your idolatry and come back to the love of the Father?*
- *Let me make sure you understand **IDOLATRY.*** (IMO, can't review or think about this too much). **Here's our definition:**
 - **Idolatry is when you love something more than God; depend on something more than God; obey something more than God.** It's when a good thing becomes an ultimate thing. Or: **Idolatry is when a good thing becomes a God thing and turns into a bad thing!**
 - **What do you love most in life?**
 - Nothing wrong with loving things, but do they dominate your emotions?
 - What do you fantasize about having?
 - What are you terrified of losing?
 - What is the one thing that you would say, 'Without that thing, life would not be worth living?'
 - *Money? Marriage? Kids? A hobby?*

- Are these things ultimate in your life? Are you an idolater? What's more important to you—your quest for money or your desire to know God?
- **What do you trust in the most?**
 - What is the 1 thing that you *need* to be there to feel secure about the future? Your job; your family; a new marriage; your 401K?
- **What commands your obedience?**
 - What are you the most faithful to obey? Your desires? What temptations can you just not say no to? Sex? Your appetite?
 - Maybe you are enslaved to success; being #1; making lots of money.
 - I know some who are so enslaved to others' opinions that they live every second of every day worrying about how to please other people, and they are willing to do anything to gain that affirmation. They are called "high school students."

These idols are things you *epithumia*.

So let me summarize 3 things John is trying to teach you:

1. Idolatrous 'love of the world' shows that God is missing from your life.

If you crave the things of the world, that shows the love of God has not filled your life.

- Your heart, see, is created with a capacity for God, and if God is not there, you crave other things. Your heart is like a vacuum.
- **The question is not if you worship, but what you worship.**
- And all the things of the world you put there don't quite satisfy you. **The lusts of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life** work something like **salt water**. It *looks like*

something that would take away your thirst, but the more you drink the thirstier you become.

- I saw a statement by **Madonna** recently in *Vogue* magazine (and if you don't know who Madonna is, she was like the **Beyonce** of my parents' generation)... and, if you're like, "How do you know what's in *Vogue* magazine?" **(no comment):** *"My drive in life comes from a fear of being mediocre. That is always pushing me. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being but then I feel I am still mediocre and uninteresting unless I do something else. Because even though I have become somebody, I still have to prove that I am somebody. My struggle has never ended and I guess it never will."*⁵ Regardless of what you think about Madonna, that is a very insightful statement. She might know herself better than you know yourself.
- ~~Oprah Winfrey describing why she worked so hard. "I discovered I didn't feel worth a damn, and certainly not worthy of love, unless I was accomplishing something."~~⁶

We will find **someone to tell us "well done."** We will find **some form of ultimate satisfaction**. If we don't choose **the love of the Father**, we'll choose the **lusts of the flesh**, lusts of the eyes and the pride of life.

- Or, the way St. **Augustine said it: our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.**

Could it be that all your stress, all your straining, all your dissatisfaction, all your worry and envy and jealousy is pointing toward the fact that you have never repented of your idolatry and come home to the love of God?

⁵ Tim Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, 22.

⁶ I suddenly realized I have never felt I could be loved just for being. - Oprah Winfrey, *Good Housekeeping*, September, 1991, p. 63.

2. The way to overcome the world is by embracing the love of the Father.

- *If idolatrous love of the world shows that the love of the Father is missing from your life, then the way to free yourself from the love of the world is by embracing the love of the Father!*
- You say, “What do I do?” **Beat myself up** for not loving God enough? No, you **embrace the love** of the Father for you.
- God gives salvation—his **perfect love**—as a **gift**. On the cross Jesus did everything necessary to save you and he said, “**It is finished!**” To be saved is just to embrace that—to rest in it!
- DON’T CONFUSE DIAGNOSIS AND PRESCRIPTION
- A few verses I’d like to give on this:
 - *“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world— (OUR SELF-DISCIPLINE? OUR RADICAL GIVING? OUR HOLY LIVING?) **our faith.**” (1 John 5:4)* Faith overcomes the world. **Salvation is not the reward for your having overcome the world. Salvation is the power by which you overcome the world.**
 - *“We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)* Knowledge of the love **of God for** you produces love **for God in** you!
 - The verse right before the idolatry one: *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. [1 John 5:20]* Because he is **the true** God, we can avoid false ones. Because we know the real eternal life, we can avoid the imitations, i.e. the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.
- Puritans: “The expulsive power of a new affection”
 - The way we overcome smaller cravings is by replacing them with a larger one.
 - It’s not that your attraction to sin is too strong, it’s that your love of God is too weak.

Finding Jesus means finding something better than what the world offers. **Here’s a list I’ve shared with you before.**

Jesus is better than money. God is an infinite and loving supplier of our needs and he never crashes or dips below 10,000.

Jesus is better than human love. Earthly marriage is just a shadow of the heavenly love we crave. The tenderness and affection and security we longed for was found in his arms.

Jesus is better than any earthly pleasures. At their best, earthly pleasures are supposed to function like rays of the sun that direct us back to their source.⁷ In his presence is fullness of joy, a brightness and a heat of pleasure that we can’t comprehend. And when on earth a cloud obstructs the sunray from us, we can hold onto the goodness of God that remains.

Jesus is better than earthly power. He holds and sustains every molecule, atom, neutron and electron in the universe and promises to commandeer all of them for our good. That’s power!

Jesus is better than popularity. Who cares about a bunch of no-account earthlings if you have the love and delight and approval of the Creator God?

Whatever you compare to God, He wins⁸

Faith in this—God’s perfect love given to you in Jesus—that overcomes the world. When you have found him, the true God,

⁷ See C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975).

⁸ See

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2010/09/03/having-god-is-better-than-money-sex-power-or-popularity/>

real eternal life, the perfect love of the Father, you won't give yourself to the lusts of the flesh and you'll be able to keep yourself from idols.

One other point I want to share with you that has really been burning on my heart:

3. Only by not "lusting for" the world can you ever "love" the world.

- Very personal. I have praying that God use this series to enable many of you to give yourself away, and I was studying this week it occurred to me that the only way you can give away the things of the world to reach the world for the gospel is when you don't depend on the things of the world for happiness.
- John 3:16. For God so loved the world *that he gave his only begotten son...*
- My prayer is that you would *so not love the world* that you can *so love the world* that you would give up *your* most precious things in the world to see the people in the world saved.
- The only way you can let it all go is...
 - By finding something better than the world can give: the love of the Father.

And there is one other thing: **By realizing that everything you give up in the world to follow Jesus you'll gain in eternity.**

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

- Whatever idol you give your life to obtain—you will lose it. Death will take it away. Your **empire will** crumble; your **fortune will** be pilfered away; your **memory will fade** from the earth.
- But for those who make God their God, and build their lives on his kingdom, they experience blessings down here and will continue to experience them forever!

- Heaven is where we enjoy all of God's creation to the fullest. **I love to think about this.** Anything I miss out on down here I get the Varsity version of in heaven!
 - ***Jesus was resurrected in a human body but it was supercharged: walk through walls.***
 - ***I have things I really would love to experience.*** I wonder what it would like to live there or drive that. And then I think, "In heaven, I'll probably have my own continent and be able to fly." So, I'm not worried about not being able to drive the nicest car down here.

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

•—Lewis: 1st things and 2nd things.

Summit Church, when you get this perspective, when you realize that whatever you give up on earth you gain in eternity, and when your life now is filled by the love of the Father, then giving yourself away in missions is joy! But if you love the things of the world then missions is drudgery.

John 3:16; Hebrews 12:2

David Livingstone (SUMMARIZE)

People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa.

Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay?

Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter?

Away with the word in such a view, and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege.

Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us.

I never made a sacrifice.⁹

Conclusion:

So let me ask you a question. What dominates your life? Is it the love of the Father, or of the world?

- A memory I always have when I preach this: **Kevin L**
 - How did my Bible get there? It fell open to 1 John 2:15 and the Holy Spirit did something in my heart that had never happened in 16 years of being in church....
 - World is like salt-water; more you drink, the more you crave!
 - This process kept going in him... went into ministry
- Maybe you are like that. Maybe you are realizing it.
- Maybe you realize that though you have considered yourself a Christian it is obvious by how much you are addicted to, and enslaved to the world you have never had a true, personal experience with the love of God! You've called yourself a Christian because you grew up in church but there is something missing from your life; there's no personal experience of the love of God; no personal relationship with God.

Are you ready to receive it today?

- You don't beat yourself up about your lack of love of God and work it up... you embrace it.

⁹ African missionary David Livingstone, Cambridge University, December 4, 1857.