

Worldly Affections Destructive of Love to God

by Edward Manning

The sermon emphasizes that worldly affections can hinder our love for God, leading to spiritual dullness and vulnerability to temptation.

Scripture: Mark 13:19

Topics: "Regeneration", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

Greek Word Studies for a sermon on the term 'ktizo' which means to bring something into existence or call it into being, emphasizing God's creativity in creating all things and the re-creation of men through regeneration. The sermon delves into the unfathomable riches of Christ, highlighting how sinners can freely partake in these riches, focusing on the centrality of Jesus Christ in providing for all our spiritual needs and inviting all to come and partake freely of His abundance.

Transcript

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love, the world, the love of the Father is not in him." I John 2:15.

John here tells us that the love of the world thrusts the love of God out of our hearts. Now this love of the world means a love either of things which are actually sinful, or of things not sinful in themselves, but hurtful and a hindrance to the love of God. The first is too plain to need a word. A love of sin must set a man at war with God; his whole inner being ranges itself in array against the Spirit of holiness. The second form of this truth is somewhat less clear, and far less thought of; and we will therefore consider it.

There are things, then, in the world, which, although not actually sinful in themselves, do nevertheless so check the love of God in us as to stifle and destroy it. For instance, it is lawful for us to possess wealth and worldly substance; we may serve God with it, and consecrate it at His altar; but we cannot love wealth without growing ostentatious, or soft, or careful, or narrow-hearted; "for the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

So, again, with friends and what is called society. It is lawful for us both to have and to love friends, both to enter into and to enjoy the pure happiness of living among them; but when we begin to find loneliness irksome, when we grow fond of being much in society, we are really trying to forget ourselves, and to get rid of sadder and better thoughts. The habit of mind which is formed in us by society is so unlike that in

which we speak with God in solitude, that it seems to wear out of us the susceptibility of deeper and higher energies.

Much more true is this when to the love of society is added a fondness for light pleasures, or a love of power, or a craving after rank and dignities. And so, once more, lawful as it is to be thoughtful and circumspect in the ordering of our life, and in thankfully enjoying the ease and happiness which God gives us, we cannot long have our thoughts on these things without becoming biased with a sort of proneness to spare and to indulge ourselves. Now it is against such dangers as these that John warns us.

They will, by a most subtle but inevitable effect, stifle the pure and single love of our hearts towards God; and that in many ways. For, in the first place, they actually turn away the affections of the heart from God. He so made our nature for Himself, that He alone is the lawful and true object of our supreme and governing love. Other lawful affections are not contrariant to this, but contained in it. The love to God presides over them all; orders, and harmonizes, and preserves them in purity and health.

But when they are loved immoderately, or chiefly, or before God, He is defrauded of so much of His own inalienable homage. They become to us as other gods, each one diverting our heart from its straight and single direction towards Him alone. It is of our affection that He speaks when He calls Himself "a jealous God." Love of worldly things, then, plainly defrauds Him of our loyalty, and checks, if it does not absolutely thrust our love to Him altogether out of our hearts. And, in the next place, it impoverishes, so to speak, the whole character of the mind.

Even the religious affections which remain undiverted are weakened and lowered in their quality. They are like the thin fruits of an exhausted soil. The virtue and the fatness of the land have been drawn off and distributed into so many channels, that what remains is cold and poor. It is wonderful how characters of great original earnestness lose their intensity by entanglement in the lower affections of the world. They spend their energy on objects both so many in number, and so beneath the care of a regenerate spirit, that they lose all unity of heart and intention.

They are even conscious to themselves that this is going on, sapping the foundations of their moral strength. Surely it is a sign of a poor mind to be greatly moved by little things; to have much fondness for the most harmless of this world's littlenesses to love them and God, as it were, in one affection. There is an evident shallowness about such minds, a lack of power to perceive the measures, and relations, and magnitude of things. Even their highest energies are slack and feeble.

Thus much, then, may be said generally. We will now consider somewhat more closely the particular CONSEQUENCES OF THIS LOVE OF THE WORLD. 1. It brings a dullness over the whole of a man's soul. To stand apart from the throng of earthly things, and to let them hurry by as they will and wither as they will, is the only sure way to calmness and clearness in the spiritual life. It is by living much alone with God, by casting off the burden of things not needful to our inner life, by narrowing our toils and our wishes to the necessities of our actual lot, that we become familiar with the world unseen.

Fasting, and prayer, and a simple life, and plainness, and freedom from the cumbering offices and possessions of the world, give to the eye and ear of the soul a keen and piercing sense. And what is this but to say, that by such a discipline the powers of our regenerate life are unfolded and enlarged? But this discipline is almost impossible to the man that moves with the stream of the world: it carries him away against his will. The oppressive nearness of the things which throng upon him from without defrauds him of solitude with God.

They come and thrust themselves between his soul and the realities unseen; they drop like a veil over the faint outlines of the invisible world, and hide it from his eyes. They ring too loudly in his ear, and throw too strong an attraction over his heart, to allow him to hear and understand. And the spiritual powers that are in him grow inert and lose their virtue by the dullness of inaction. This is most clearly perceptible, not only in persons of a predominately worldly tone of mind, but in those who have been, and still are in some measure, religious; and none know it better than they.

Perhaps the only feeling which long retains its keenness after the religious affections are deadened, is the fearful consciousness that they can no longer love God as they loved Him once. They are painfully alive to a sense of the eager and importunate sympathy, the warm and clinging fondness which they still have for the goings on of their worldly life, and the stunned and senseless heart with which they turn to the heart of God. When they are on their knees before Him, even at the foot of the altar, and in the very act of prayer, they feel in a strange unnatural posture; and are half in doubt whether it were not better to make no approach to Him at all, than to draw near with a heart so deaf and dull.

Now to this, and, alas, often far beyond this, many blameless and good-hearted people are brought at last. Much trading, or much toiling for advancement, or much popularity, or much communion in the usages and engagements of society, or the giving up of much time to the refinements of a soft life,-- these, and many like snares, steal away the quick powers of the heart, and leave us estranged from God. And this is the secret of the oppressive weariness which people who live in the world feel in all holy duties.

The acts of religion, such as reading, thought, contemplation of the unseen, prayer, self-examination, the fasts, feasts, and offices of the Church, first seem to lose their savor, and are less delighted in; then they grow irksome; and are consciously avoided. So it must be. When religion ceases to be a delight, it becomes a yoke. Serve God we must, either in freedom or in bondage: if not for love, then for fear. If we love the world, we shall only fear God. We shall turn to our profession or our calling, or to society, or to our pleasures in life, with speed and gladness, but to God with constrained prayers and reluctant confessions.

We shall go to Him with distant and equivocating hearts, and turn from Him with a secret readiness which makes us tremble. How awfully do people deceive themselves in this matter! We hear them saying, "It does me no harm to go into the world: I come away, and can go into my room and pray as usual." Oh, surest sign of a heart half laid asleep! You are not aware of the change, because it has passed upon you. Once, in days of livelier faith, you would have wept over the indevoutness of your present prayers, and joined them to the confession of your other backslidings; but now your heart is not more earnest than your prayers, and there is no index to mark the decline.

Even they that lament the loss of their former earnestness do not half know the real measure of their loss. The growth of a duller feeling has the power of masking itself. Little by little it creeps on, marked by no great changes, much as the dimness of the natural sight, which must reach to an advanced point before it is detected to be more than a passing film. And so the inward affections lose all their freshness, and the pure light of the heart is over-cast, and its love towards God grows cold.

The mind is excited, and its feelings and powers drawn into life and play on every other side; but in the region which lies towards God it is bleak and lonely; and the faint gleams of heavenly love, which must be fed by insights of the world unseen, flicker and decay in the unwholesome neighborhood of worldly affections. 2. I will notice one more consequence. As we grow to be attached to the things that are in the world, there comes over us what I may call a vulnerableness of mind.

We lay ourselves open on just so many sides as we have objects of desire. We give hostages to this changeful world, and we are ever either losing them, or trembling lest they be wrested from us. What a life of disappointment, and bitterness, and aching fear, and restless uncertainty, is the life of the ambitious, or covetous, or self-indulgent! Merchants, trading at a thousand hazards; statesmen, climbing up to slippery places; men of letters, catching at every breath of fame; men of the world, toiling to sustain a great appearance--how anxious, and craving, how sensitive, and impatient of an equal do they become!

How saddened, how ill at ease, how preyed upon by the inward shining of the love of God! Where this is, there is contentment and a submissive will, and a glad consent in our present lot, and a simplicity which shields itself from the throng of manifold perturbations. But all these hallowed and happy tempers are frightened away by the writhing and the moaning of a worldly spirit, chafing against the visitations which invade or sever its earthly attachments. But it is not only in this form that the mind is made vulnerable by a love of the world.

It lays itself open not more to chastisements than to temptations; it gives so many inlets to the suggestions of evil. Every earthly fondness is an ambush for a thousand solicitations of the wicked one. Through these he fills men with pride, vanity, vain-glory, with ambition and jealous rivalry, with a greedy mind, with murmuring and discontent, with unthankfulness and mistrust of God. Any affection, either ill-directed or inordinate, passes into a temptation. It is a lure to the tempter--a signal which betrays our weaker side; and as the subtle infection of evil tempers winds itself into the mind, the Spirit of the Dove is grieved by an irritable and unloving spirit.

The very affections of the heart recoil sullenly into themselves, and sometimes even turn against the objects of their immoderate fondness. In this way the love of the world becomes a cause of very serious deterioration of character. It soon stifles the love of God; and when that is gone, and the character has lost its unity, particular features unfold themselves into a fearful prominence. The chief among its earthly affections becomes thenceforth its ruling passion; and so predominates over all the rest, and draws the whole mind to itself, as to stamp the man with the character of a besetting sin.

And this is what we mean when we call one man purse-proud, and another ostentatious, or wordly-minded, or selfish, and the like. The world has eaten its way into his soul, and "the love of the Father is not in him" Now, if this be so, what shall we do? If it were possible for us to begin life over again, and to lay it out upon some definite and carefully adjusted plan, we might avoid the entanglements of the world. But almost every one of us already finds himself fully implicated in the embarrassments of life, and involved in a multitude of inferior attachments, before he is well aware.

What, then, is to be done? We cannot withdraw ourselves. One has wealth, another a family, a third rank and influence, another a large business; and all these bring with them an endless variety of duties and responsibilities, and usages of custom and courtesy. If a man is to break through all these, he must needs go out of this world. All this is very true: but, at the same time, it is certain that every one of us might reduce his life to a greater simplicity. In every position in life there is a great multitude of unnecessary things which we may readily abandon: if we were to examine carefully the objects on which we bestow time and money, thought and earnestness, we should find many that are purely artificial.

Many things we do only because others have done them before us; many by mere passive imitation. We are all over-ready to combine many characters, or pursuits, or offices together; to make heavier our own burdens; we learn to form exaggerated judgments of the worth and importance of things from other men;

and all this gathers into a worldliness of character, and overspreads our mind, fearfully oppressing the religious life within us. Now, they are happiest who are most discharged from contact with the world; who can sit, like Mary, at the Lord's feet without distraction.

Most peaceful life, to have nothing to do with the conflicts, or changes, or possessions of this world: to have enough, and somewhat for them, that lack; and friends, so as not to be desolate, and yet without excess carefulness! What is there for them to do, but to wait on God, and to look out for the resurrection? But they are very few to whom this scarce and solitary lot is given. The great multitude of men are so interwoven in the tangled maze of relations and duties, that they must take the burden with the blessing; and yet even they would find that they are allowing their heart to be diverted and impoverished, and their affections to be dulled and deteriorated, by entanglement with many things from which a little boldness and a little decision would set them free.

All that is not necessary may be cast off. Our unwariness, or our own free choice, has encumbered us with it; and it is in our own hands to undo it again. And as for all the necessary cares of life, they need involve us in no dangers. In them, if we be true-hearted, we are safe. The inevitable relations of our earthly lot are the appointments and declaration of God's will to us. It is He that has surrounded us with them, and there is no danger in His dispensations. "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt any man."

Besides, even though a man were never so deeply implicated with the relations of life, there is no need that he should allow them to usurp upon him. He may live in the midst of them with an unsubdued and single heart; he may meet them cheerfully, fulfill what they exact of him, but do them no homage; yield to them no mastery over his inward purpose. He submits to them as to a rule of God's ordaining; accomplishing day by day his toil, or study, or professional offices; mixing, too, in life, taking pleasure in its pure happiness and fond affections, without fear or doubting, knowing that he is where God has willed his probation.

But the deep movements of his heart are reserved for God alone. All other emotions are partial, affecting only a portion of his spiritual life; but this extends over all, and concentrates all upon itself. It is only towards God that he turns with a perfect unity of will. And, besides that the necessary entanglements of our lot are thus in themselves safe and lawful, God in His mercy shields an obedient mind from the deteriorating effects of inevitable contact with the world.

When He leads men into positions of great trial, whether by wealth, or rank, or business, He compensates by larger gifts of grace. The spiritual life is perpetually replenished by the "powers of the world to come;" and we find men who are the most burdened, and even overborne, by the thronging toils of daily life, or lured and solicited by the splendors of the world, not only holding out against the secularizing action of worldly things, but even confirmed and elevated to a higher pitch of devotion.

The world not only has no power to conform them to itself, but it becomes a sort of counter-pressure, which forces them, to take shelter in a secret life of self-renouncement. It keeps them ever on the watch, by a consciousness that to relax is to be in peril; and therefore it often happens that none are more dead to the world than they that have it around them in the largest measure. They have learned its emptiness and its bitterness, and recoil into themselves, as into a silence where the presence of God is heard: they have had many struggles with it, and gained many masteries, and suffered many wounds, and they have become estranged from it, and suspicious of all its advances and allurements; and have learned that, whensoever they have leaned upon it, an edge has pierced them, and that there is no safety but in God.

From all this, then, it is plain that we can never charge the worldliness of our hearts upon our lot in life; for our hindrances are either made by entanglement in things which are unnecessary, or, if in necessary things, are made through some inward fault of our own. Let us therefore no more pretend to excuse the withholding of our hearts from God, or the poverty and dullness of our affections, on the plea that the cares and duties of the world keep us back from a devoted life.

Still less let us persuade ourselves, that the temptations to which we needlessly expose ourselves are inevitable and appointed of God, or that we can resist their action. They have already overcome us, as soon as we allow them to pass within the precinct of our daily life. We can still, however, with great ease, in due season, disentangle ourselves from all needless hindrances. The rest will be no hindrance to the love of God. All pure loves may dwell under its shadow. Only we must not allow them to shoot above, and to overcast it; for the love of God will not grow in the shade of any worldly affection.

Above all, let us pray of Him to shed abroad in our hearts more and more of His love; that is, a fuller and deeper sense of His exceeding love towards us. It is thus He draws our love upward to Himself. "We love Him because He first loved us." The consciousness of this divine love comes down like a flood of light upon our darkened hearts, transfiguring all pure love of God's creatures with exceeding brightness, making all the affections of our spiritual life harmonious and eternal.

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