

# You Cannot Love God and the World

by James La Belle

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*The sermon emphasizes the incompatibility of loving God and loving the world, urging believers to prioritize their devotion to God above all worldly desires.*

**Duration:** 37:02

**Scripture:** Hosea 10:1, Matthew 6:33, Mark 8:36, Mark 12:30

**Topics:** "Worldliness"

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## Description

In this sermon, the focus is on Mark 12:30, where Jesus commands us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The preacher acknowledges the difficulty of this command and prays for God's grace to enable us to fulfill it. The sermon emphasizes the importance of separating ourselves from the world and looking to God, rather than being enticed by worldly desires. The preacher concludes by challenging the listeners to examine their hearts and determine whether they truly love God or if they are more attached to the world.

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## Transcript

Please turn this morning to Mark chapter 12 for the proclamation of the Word of God. If you're using the Pew Bibles, it's on page 1080. We're focusing once again on verse 30 this morning, and I would just read that verse for us.

Let's give attention to the Word of God. Jesus declares to us, "...and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Thus saith the Lord. Let us pray.

Almighty God, the Lord our God, You have called us to love You with everything in us. And yet, O God, how difficult this is. We pray, O Lord, that You would grant the grace necessary.

Make us willing in Your day of power, and stir our hearts that we might love You this morning with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind, with all of our strength. For without You we can do nothing. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Well, we learned last Lord's Day, as we looked at this passage for a second time, that we can love the good things of the world in a certain sense. We can love the world so long as the world helps us toward heaven. We can love the world so long as the world makes us more like Christ.

We can love the world so long as it doesn't become an occasion for sin. And we can love the world so long as it is consistent with loving our God with our all to the full. So, we can love the world in that way.

That's not what I'm going to talk about today. You can see from the title of the sermon, you cannot love God and the world. So, I'm not talking about that sort of love.

Instead, this morning, I want to speak about that love for the world which is inconsistent and incompatible with the love for God. I want to speak about that love for the world that threatens the Christian and that is destroying the church's witness today throughout the world. I want to speak about that love for the world which God forbids and which makes a person God's enemy.

And so, let's begin by answering the question simply, what is it to love the world? What does it mean to love the world in the way that you cannot? In the way that we are not to love the world. Well, I have a many-fold answer for you. First of all, according to 1 John 2, 15 and 16, which is the passage which comes to our minds probably right away when we hear that loving the world is a sin, loving the world is forbidden.

Instead of living, John says, for the honour and for the praise and for the glory of God as our chief end, as the Catechism says, and as our highest good. To love the world is to live, John says in those verses, for the pleasures, for the profits and for the honours of the world as our chief end and as our highest good. Now, let's look at these three that he mentions.

So, first of all, to love the world in this way is to lust, John says, after the pleasures of the world as our chief end and highest good. It's to live for pleasure. It's to live for eating, to live for drinking.

It's to live for entertainment, for recreations. It's to live for sensuality. It's to give yourselves to the pleasures of the world as if you were to die tomorrow and today was your last and final indulgence.

James 5.5, in fact, speaks of it as living in self-indulgence. The picture is of one of fish. Fish live in the water.

So, to love the world is to live in pleasures. It's to have the heart steeped, immersed and drowned in pleasures, which is why James goes on to say that it is a fattening of the heart in a day of slaughter. Loving the world in this way, living in self-indulgence, is a fattening of the heart.

It is to pamper the flesh and to starve the soul. It is to make pleasures your God, which is why Paul speaks of those who mind earthly things in Philippians 3.19 as those whose God is their belly. Secondly, taking what John says in this passage, to love the world in this way is to lust after the riches or possessions of the world as our chief end and as our highest good.

We think of the covetous man. The covetous man's eyes are greedy, we're told in Scripture, after gold and silver. And according to Ecclesiastes 4, verse 8, he is never satisfied with the riches that he obtains because his riches cater his flesh.

His riches make provision for his flesh, which means it's not so much the money that the rich man or the covetous man loves. Rather, it's what money can do for his flesh. He lives for money so that he might satisfy his cravings.

He thinks of nothing else but to get more money so that he can spend more on himself. He refuses that anything which promises delight should be outside of his reach. He refuses to be denied the best, the

most expensive, the latest and the greatest.

And in fact, he is described in Scripture as one who runs after the world, panting after the world. What a great difference there is between that and the image of the psalmist. My soul pants for you, O God, as the deer pants for the water.

The covetous man pants. He runs out of breath for the world's things. 1 Timothy 6, in fact, speaks of the covetous man as he that craves to be rich.

He'll have the world one way or another, by hook or by crook, whatever it may cost, whatever indeed it may cost him, whatever may come of it, he will have money. So he can have the world. He craves to be rich.

Thirdly, in this passage that John gives us, 1 John 2, it is to lust after the world's honors as our chief end and our highest good. It is to eye and crave and live for the world's applause, the world's crowns, the world's smiles. It is to labor, to work for the world's favors.

And so John 12 speaks of those among the chief rulers who believed in Jesus, but would not confess Him, lest they be thrown out of the synagogue. And then verse 43 gives the reason why. It wasn't so much that they would be thrown out of the synagogue.

The real reason was, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Now secondly, what does it mean to love the world? To love the world is to live with the world as the center of gravity for our will, our affections, our desires, our thoughts, our time, our money, our energy. It is to live with the world at the center of all that we do.

Everything we do is with an eye to have and to enjoy, not God, not the things of God, but more of this world, more of the now. Well, let's delineate this a little bit. To love the world then is to have our thoughts centered on the world, because what we love most is what we think about most.

We looked at that last week. Psalm 119 verse 97 speaks of the law of God being our meditation all the day. But to love the world is to go to bed thinking about the world.

It's to rise up thinking about the world. It's to spend the whole day thinking about the world. It's to have the mind so taken up with the world that it's to the world that our mind goes when our mind goes to neutral.

Our mind goes in drive and we pursue things and we dwell upon things. But where does your mind go when you put it in neutral? When you think about nothing at all, what do you think about? A lover of the world thinks about the world, what he wants, what he doesn't have, what he must have, what he needs, what he craves. He thinks about these things.

Our mind lodges then in the world. We breathe the world's air. We dream of nothing but the world's pleasures, profits and honors.

And what does this prove? But that we love the world, we live in the world and we seek our inheritance in the world. We have no intention to have an inheritance above, something that awaits us when this world is over. Though it is but a vapor, Job says, we think not of that.

All we want now, we want our possessions now as a prodigal son, as passion in Pilgrim's Progress. Give me my all, what is coming to me now. I cannot, I must not, I will not wait.

There's no room for thoughts of God in a mind so filled with the world. Further, to love the world is to have our desires and affections centered on the world. The world as the center of gravity for all that we desire and love.

Despite the fact that we're commanded in Colossians 3 verse 2 to set our affections on things above where Christ is and we in Him. And despite the fact that Psalm 62 verse 10 warns us not to set our hearts on riches because they take up wings and they fly away, he says. To love the world is to join our hearts to idols.

It is to allow our hearts to be taken up with the world and stolen away with the things of the world. To so love it that we are taken by it. It's to have the heart so planted in the world, so glued to the world, so nailed to the world, that we become one with it.

We marry it as we consider last Lord's Day. We become married to the world. And therefore, to have then this love for the world is to have our desires and affections under the dominion of the world so that we become, as Jesus says, enslaved to the world.

We feel ourselves to be at liberty because we have the ability possibly to have anything we want. Nothing stands in our way. We can do what we want.

And yet Jesus says we're not free at all. We are in fact the most enslaved of all. We are under the dominion of the world.

There's no desire or affection for God in such a heart as this. Pick up another point. To love the world is to have our strength centered on the world.

John 6, 27 speaks of it as laboring for the meat which perishes. Romans 13, 14 speaks of it as making provision for the lusts of the flesh to fulfill them, to satisfy them, to gratify them, so that everything we do, all of our energy and our might and our strength, every waking hour is spent investing in how we can satisfy or, as the verse says, make provision for our cravings, our lusts. There's no strength left in such a person to run the Christian race, to fight the good fight that Paul says he fought.

There's no strength left in such a person to strive for that holiness without which no man will see the Lord, as Hebrews 12 says. There's no strength in such a person to labor for the food that endures to eternal life. There's no strength left to deny self.

All strength is given to the love of self. Further, to love the world is to have our best efforts centered on the pursuit and the preservation of worldly goods so that there is nothing left for spiritual things. Agai saw this in his day when the Jews who returned from exile spent their time, their energy and their money adorning their own houses while the house of God lay in ruins.

God raised up Agai to rebuke the people. How can this be? They began building God's house, but they wearied of it. They gave all their energy to their own house.

They so minded the earthly things that they lost all interest in divine concerns. Their efforts were spent on the world. And finally, under this, to love the world is to have our contentment and our satisfaction centered on the things of the world.

It's to worship, as Paul says in Romans 1, the creature rather than the creator. It's to make our life consist, as Jesus says it doesn't, in the abundance of our possessions. It is to rest satisfied with the world, though we're strangers to God, though we find ourselves under his curse, we are still satisfied with what we have now.

It's to be content with the world's portion, though we are at enmity with God, because we are a lover of the world. We are away from God as our portion, and yet we find ourselves content. It's to prefer the world and worldly things to spiritual things in our conversations.

It's to prefer the world to the things of God in our pastimes. It's to prefer the present world to eternal rewards. It's to prefer the entertainment of the world to the word of God.

It's to find our greatest comforts and our sweetest consolations in the things of the world rather than in God. But thirdly, what is it to love the world? To love the world is to endure no limit of hardships to get it and to keep it. When we love the world, we will traverse land and sea.

We will brave storm and rain. We will endure cold and heat just to get more. We'll make the greatest sacrifices, and we will justify the greatest of expenses, because it gets us more of the world.

No amount of difficulty stands in our way. Nothing can quench the love we have for the world. We never grow weary of pursuing it.

It would weary us. It would tire us. It would cost us greatly.

We would lose left and right, yet we will not let up. We have this great pursuit. When we love the world, we will be driven by a pursuit after it, and all around would see how foolish we are being, and yet still we find somehow more energy, more time, more to give to the pursuit, the striving, the laboring, the running after the things of the world.

By comparison, though, how quickly do worldly people weary of the things of God. Amos 8, verse 5 speaks of those who say, When will the new moon be over that we may sell grain? When will the Sabbath be over that we may offer wheat for sale? When are the things of God done with? The new moon was a festival. The Sabbath, of course, the Lord's Day.

When will these things be over that we may return to the world and sell and get money so that we can have what we want? Such men who love the world can endure any difficulty to get the world, but they can hardly endure anything. Hardly endure anything to get heaven, to get grace, or to get an eternal interest in Christ. Take this point in summary.

To love the world is really to be under the curse of the serpent. To love the world is to be under the curse of the serpent. In Genesis 3, verse 14, it is to go through life on our belly, eating the dust of the earth.

Now, why are we who are created in the image of God and can boast of greater creation than the angels, why are we found to be bowed down so as to eat the dust of the earth all our days? Why is such a thing even done? Why do we see people eating the dust of the earth all their days? It is because they are weighed down by a love for the world and they cannot stand up. They go through world on their bellies. They go through the world eating the dust.

Take such a heart as this that loves the world. Where is a love for God in this heart? Where is a love for the things of God? Where is a love for the things of heaven? Where is a love for the Word of God? Where is a love for the Lord's Day? Where is a love for the means of grace in such a heart that is so in love with the world? It cannot exist. It cannot exist in a heart so full and so in love with the present world.

Just as Jesus has declared, you cannot serve God and money. But let me do more than just say so. Let me give you these reasons why such a sinful love for the world is inconsistent with a love for God.

My prayer indeed is that it will serve to draw us all from this world and unto Christ. Why is love for the world inconsistent with a love for God then? Well, first of all, because love for the world is contrary to a love for God. That's why 1 John 2.15 prohibits a love for the world or the things of the world because as John says, if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

It's contrary. And of course, what does our Lord declare? What we read in Matthew 6.24. But that a love for the world and a love for God are polar opposites. Jesus says no man can serve God and the world because they both require the whole heart.

And they both require the whole man. They both command contrary to one another. You cannot obey them both.

Take these for example. What does the world command of you? But that you engage no farther in religion than will keep religion subject to your lusts. But God commands that you forsake the whole world, take up your cross and follow Him.

You can't do both. The world commands that you indulge yourself on creation. It is here for your using.

Use all of it. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die. Yet, what does God command? God commands us to use the world as if we did not use it.

To be so separate from it. God commands us to give perishing things perishing thoughts. Not to dwell upon them in the way that we do upon eternal things.

For they are passing away with the using. God commands us to give perishing things perishing thoughts. Not to dwell upon them in the way that we do upon eternal things.

God commands us to bid farewell to all things so far as they prove a snare to our soul. God commands us to subject the world to the welfare of our eternal souls. Yet, we find so many subjecting their souls to the welfare of their fading bodies.

The world commands you further to endeavor the enlarging of your name, of your reputation. Get the most. Get the greatest.

Get the best. Have the biggest name. Be famous.

Be rich. Everyone will know you and bow down to you. But what does God command? God says, glory in nothing but the cross of Christ by which you were crucified to the world and the world to you.

God commands that you account abasement, humbling for Christ's sake, your greatest honor. The world commands you not to be scrupulous about small sins. The world commands you as a Christian to enjoy liberty, to enjoy latitude.

Don't let anyone bind your conscience. The small things are fine. But what does God command? God says we should dread the least sin more than the greatest suffering.

Secondly, love for the world is inconsistent with the love for God because the love for the world robs God of the honor of the greatest suffering. The honor and the love which is His alone. In whatever measure your heart turns to the world, in the same measure does it turn from God.

This was Israel's case in Hosea 10. God describes Israel in that verse as a luxuriant vine weighed down with much fruit. A beautiful picture, except what was the fruit? It wasn't fruit to God.

It was rotten and sinful fruit which she had borne her idols. She had robbed God of His due and was giving it to her idols. Thirdly, a love for the world is inconsistent with a love for God because a love for the world is nothing less than idolatry.

Now, we would object to being called idolaters or idolatrous people, but the bottom line according to Scripture, Colossians 3.5, is that if we love the world, then God says we are idolaters. That we are living in idolatry. Take the fourth point then.

Love for the world is nothing less than spiritual adultery. Again, we would object to being called adulterers. And yet, James 4, verse 4 calls His Christian readers adulteresses because they've allowed a place in their hearts for the world.

Ezekiel 16, verse 30, the Lord says of Israel, how sick is your heart because you did all the deeds of a brazen prostitute. If we are Christians and we have built a chamber in our hearts for the world, even a small chamber, one corner for the world we preserve, then God says we are adulterers and adulteresses. And we are living in adultery.

A love for the world is inconsistent with a love for God, fifthly, because a love for the world is habitual enmity and rebellion against God. When our hearts are bent by love towards the world, when our hearts are bound by love under the dominion of the world, and when our hearts are united by love as one with the world, then according to James 4, verse 4, again, we're living in rebellion against God. We are at enmity with God because to be a friend of the world, He says, is to be the enemy of God.

And how dreadful it is to have the great God as your enemy. The Lord of all hosts. The Lord of the Sabbaths.

The Lord of heaven and earth. It would be better to have the entire world against us than the one true and living God. Because to love the world is to set God against ourselves.

Number six, love for the world is inconsistent with a love for God because a love for the world puts the lie to our profession. To love the world with our time and with our thoughts, with our money and with our energy, with our strength and with our zeal is to betray whatever confession we may have made with our lips. And it is to prove with the Jews in John 5, verse 42, that we do not have the love of God within us.

Because whatever confession we have made, whatever love for God there might be in our lips when we've been the whole of our lives after the shape of the world and we've proved that there is no love of God in our hearts. According to what Paul says in 2 Timothy 3, verse 5, we are those who have only a form of godliness. The outward shape.

But we deny its power. It's not alive within us. We are dead.

Even as Jesus said of the Pharisees, whitewashed tombs. Outwardly beautiful. Inwardly full of dead men's bones.

Number seven, to love the world is inconsistent with a love for God because to love the world is to hate God. Psalm 97, verse 10 shows that to love the Lord is to hate evil and therefore, to love the world which is evil is to hate God. And finally, a love for the world is inconsistent with a love for God because a love for the world is hostile to godliness.

The world is a great enemy to godliness because the world diverts the heart from spiritual things and it chokes the fruitfulness of the means of grace. You know the parable. The parable of the sower.

Matthew 13, verse 22 says, as for what was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word. There is a hearing. But the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word so that it proves unfruitful.

The Word of God, mighty to growing one in grace and yet the cares of the world will choke it away in a moment so that he who loves the world, John tells us, he who loves the world will never grow in grace because of worldly thoughts. Worldly things will choke it away. He will never be conformed to Christ because he's conformed to the world.

He will never overcome sin because he can't deny himself and follow Christ and therefore, he will never make it to heaven. A love for the world is inconsistent and incompatible with a love for God. These then are the many reasons why this love is incompatible with a true love for God.

Scripture declares it. It is so. And yet, how many run? How many try to run both of these races? Let me leave with you this morning three lessons that I think we can learn from this.

First of all, what does this show? This incompatibility between a love for the world and a love for God, this shows how dangerous it is to love the world. How dangerous it is to love the world. A man who loves the world grows little by little to be a stranger to God and His Christ because the nearer we draw to the world, the farther we draw away from God.

The more we drink at the cistern which is broken and filled with polluted water, the less we will go to the fountain which flows clean. Moreover, a love for the world is dangerous because to dally with the world is to become acquainted with the ways of the worldly. And on the surface, this may not seem like a big deal as long as we don't imitate the world.

But such a close acquaintance with the world, the Bible says, defiles us. It subtly defiles us and it leaves us hardened to the things of God. And more than that, it leaves us craving for the things of the world.

Such an acquaintance and a familiarity with the world actually nurses and nourishes our internal worldliness, the problem that we have of our own until it breaks out in open sin. We don't realize what an ongoing acquaintance with the world is doing to our hearts until it's too late and we find ourselves where we thought we would never be in sin. And that's why worldly entertainment isn't as harmless as most Christians think that it is because it's one of Satan's favorite ways to desensitize our consciences until we become, first of all, comfortable with being entertained by sin.

And then secondly and more dangerously, we become comfortable with sin in our own lives. The presence of sin. Furthermore, love for the world is dangerous because it makes a man leave Christ.

Think of the rich young ruler in Mark chapter 10 who would have done, he said, anything to have eternal life until Christ told him he had to leave the world. And then he parted ways. Think of the Gerasenes in Mark chapter 5 who pleaded with Christ to leave them because they preferred their pigs to Christ.

And think of the fact that a love for the world ultimately leads to apostasy. Why else did Judas betray our Lord for 30 pieces of silver? But he loved the world. If we love the world, we will turn our backs on the faith.

We will abandon the ways of God. We will leave God. Think of what Paul said of Demas who is praised earlier in the epistles, but then later toward the end of Paul's life, 2 Timothy 4.10 says, Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me.

He apostatized. Finally, a love for the world is dangerous because it exposes us to the devil's snare. What else is the world, beloved, but the snare of the devil by which he holds people captive? He leads them away to do his will.

In 1 Timothy 6, Paul said, those who desire to be rich fall into snares that plunge them then into ruin and destruction. And so it was by the lust of the flesh that he caught Eve and David and Achan. It was by the lust of the eyes that he caught Gehazi and the rich young ruler.

It was by the pride of life that Satan caught Haman and Herod. The world is his snare. And therefore, the odds are 10,000 to 1, not only that we lose a good conscience by loving the world, but we will lose our very souls because Mark 8, verse 36 teaches us that those who gain the world do so at the eternal price of their soul.

Secondly, this shows how few there are on the narrow way of life. Since the majority of churchgoers live lives indistinguishable from those who don't even know Christ. The majority of those who profess Christ show by their lives that they don't love Christ despite what their lips say.

They show in every practical way that they side with the world against God rather than with God against the world. Because the majority of those who profess Christ live a life of parlaying with the world which is the enemy of God. How hopeless then is a worldly church? A worldly church is hopeless.

And there are many. Called churches and yet look no different than the world. Their only hope is obviously in their immediate and their total repentance.

Because if the Lord comes back and finds them entangled as they are, then He will judge them for the lovers of the world that they are. How sad then will that day be when Christ comes to separate, as He says He will, the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the tares, those who cried, Lord, Lord, from those who fulfilled or did the will of the Father. Only then will we see how narrow the way really was and why so few walked it.

Thirdly, this makes clear how hard we should labor after a holy contempt for this filthy, sin-polluted world. We go through the world. We are in the world.

We cannot avoid seeing the world while we pass through it on the way to the celestial city. But we must look at this world with a holy disregard, accounting the evil of the world as a contrary course to be shunned at all cost and counting the good of the world as the Lord's provision for a night, but no more. We are to enjoy the things of this world for a night.

This world is our inn, not our mansion. We stay here for a short time. And therefore, we must begin today in our own lives, the separation from the world that God will complete on judgment day.

And that begins by looking away from the world and looking unto Him who is invisible. It begins by closing our eyes to the world and a thousand snares and looking with the eyes of faith unto Him who promises to lead the blind safe to harbor. I'll close this morning by leaving you with several questions for self-examination whereby you might know whether you love the world or God.

Because there is no middle between these two. There is no middle. Are you more concerned about the things of the world than you are for heaven and spiritual things? Are you as diligent for the safety of your soul as you are for the safety and security of your finances or your body? Does the world push aside and cut out the things of God? When the things of the world and the things of God are in competition, who wins? Are you content with a little when it comes to matters of the soul? Are you content with a little grace? A little knowledge? A little bit of Christ? A little communion with God? A little heavenly mindedness? Do you hunger and thirst for more of Christ? More of grace? More of heaven? Do you long to depart and be with Christ? In what do you find the most sweetness and contentment? Do you have an eager palate for the world and find that the things of heaven taste like the white of an egg? Or have you tasted and seen that the Lord is good? Do you use unlawful means to get the world while neglecting lawful means to get heaven? And are you more concerned with the loss of outward worldly things than you are for the loss of spiritual things? Angry when the game is cancelled, but unbothered when service is cancelled.

By an honest weighing of ourselves and the balance of these questions, each of us can discern whether we love the world or whether we love God. And if you see yourself to be a lover of the world, then call out to the God of grace that He might deliver you from such a bondage, for it is no freedom, and that He might yoke you, indeed, put you in bondage, to the Lord Jesus Christ who is more lovely than 10,000 worlds, even the lover of our souls. But may it be seen by the grace of God that all of us are not only loved by God, but indeed, have hearts filled with love for God.

Hearts that would rather suffer than sin. Hearts that would rather be cut off from the world than be cut off from God. Hearts that would rather miss the whole world than miss one ounce of God's love.

Hearts that would rather be in hell with God than in heaven without Him. Do we love? We are called to love Him with all of our heart, but it's only when we interchange such preferences as these that we can be sure that we do love God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind, and with all of our strength. And only God can work this in us.

And may He do so, for His promise is this, that we become willing in the day of His power. Amen.

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