

***1 John 2:15-17. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.***

### **Hold onto the prize!**

- 1. Recognize how temporary the things of this world are!**
- 2. Love God who blesses you with an eternal reward!**

A prize has been handed to the contestant and now it is time to choose. *Do I hang onto the prize that I have? Do I give into my curiosity and my desire to have something that might be even better? Or do I try to figure out a way to win both?* This is the simple premise of the game show, “Let’s Make a Deal”. If you have ever have run across this particular game show it can be very entertaining to watch with contestants dressed in wild outfits and presented with these intriguing options. As you watch your own curiosity and your own excitement may suddenly be tapped into and you may find yourself either urging the contestant to risk it all or yelling for him or her to hold onto the original prize.

While entertaining in the framework of a game show, this is the type of game that the world tries to play with the Christian. And in this context the game suddenly turns dangerous. We have been given a precious prize of eternal life. We have a God who loves us and has given us the unending joy of heaven through faith in Jesus Christ. But the world shouts out to the Christian, “Let’s make a Deal.” And so the Christian is constantly flooded with different offers from this world. Offers come from all directions and promise all sorts of different things. Wealth and success, excitement and pleasure, passion and romance, even family bliss and individual pride are all floated before our eyes. Some of these appear to be very good and very attractive at first blush, but the subtle yet grand deception in all of this is that, somehow, this collection of temporary rewards is better than the eternal prize that we already have. And so through a constant stream of images from television and computer screens, billboards and magazines and newspaper advertisements, as well as through the seemingly attractive lives of worldly neighbors, the world around us lays this trap so that we might be tempted to overlook that eternal prize that has been placed into our hands. Our sinful natures are deceived into thinking that we can harmlessly play the game, and make the deal, and have it all - all the pleasures of the world that we could want while still being a child of God.

However, our sinful hearts are not so easily divided, are they? For when we are distracted by the sinful pleasures of this world we are then easily pushed to, and over,

the edge. No longer are we simply occupied or distracted by the pleasures of this world, but when enticed by earth's treasures we may be pushed to risk it all, even our eternal reward, for this pile of passing pleasure.

The things of this world want to dominate our time and our hearts and the sinful flesh is easily persuaded. The things of this world not only want a place in our lives, but they want our devotion and our love and our sinful flesh is easily wooed. The things of this world not only want to borrow our hearts, but they want to own our hearts entirely. We are naturally attracted to that which is daily placed in front of us; that which we can see, and that which is flashy and exciting and new. We are prone to fall into love with the pleasures of this world and the things that please our sinful flesh. We like to watch pleasures and tangible things pile up in our lives so that we count them and boast about the things that we have, and the things that we have accomplished. And the most dangerous part of this is that such pursuits have this horrible penchant for overshadowing the prize that we already have in Christ. Such an attachment and such an attraction to the things of this world can quickly crowd the love of God out of our heart as we instead give our love, and our time, and our devotion to worldly pleasures.

Maybe that sounds a bit excessive to you, but consider the amount of time that give our time our energy our concern to things of this world, and then compare it to the time that we spend in prayer and the time we spend in God's Word. How much attention do we give to financial affairs and business endeavors compared to spiritual matters? How much time and devotion do we give to our earthly interests and hobbies and even leisure time compared to the time we spend in quiet devotion and careful meditation of God's Word? How often do we pause to give thanks to God compared to the time that we put in to accumulating stuff and building a life that is filled with things? Based on this evidence ask yourself, what are you most committed to? What do you love - your things or your God?

And then on top of that how much of ourselves do we give in our devotion to each other? Our Lord Jesus reminds us that this attraction of the world not only involves our relationship with things, but our relationship with others. Our relationship with a special someone very likely takes much more of our attention and our energy than our relationship with God. Often we are willing to chat about any old thing on the phone for hours with a friend or a family member, which is a great and wonderful thing, but not we neglect time spent with God and his word for not only hours, but days, at times even weeks, sometimes years even. We need to recognize the importance of spending quality time working on our relationship with God. God wants to be first in our life and we have a problem with this. We have the sinful nature that loves putting our relationship with things and other people in front of our relationship with God and the world cheers us on. That unhealthy ratio of time and devotion only gets worse without regular reminders from God.

So the LORD makes sure that he grabs our attention and makes sure that we see what a dangerous game this can be. In his word God warns us in various ways. For example, he shows us the many mistakes of the Israelite people. They knew their God

and experienced this special relationship with God. He made his presence known among them. They saw his presence in the pillar of cloud and fire. They saw the great things that he could do for them and yet they were so easily and so often enticed by the things of this world. As we saw in the lesson of the golden calf, so easily, so quickly they gave themselves over to desires of the flesh and fashioned for themselves idols as they were influenced by their neighbors. Let us learn from their mistakes and avoid the trappings that so easily ensnared God's ancient people.

Later our Savior, Jesus himself, would advise us of the dangers of falling for the attractions of this world around us, ***"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36).*** Let us learn from our Savior and hear his warning to avoid the things that can so easily entangle us and even tear us away from what is truly important.

Time and again God warns us not to put our spiritual health at risk in order to attain temporary and worldly gain. However, this is a weakness that we suffer from, a temptation to which we are especially vulnerable, and so the Lord again gives us the warning and encouragement that we need, again and again in his Word. This time he does it through the apostle John. The apostle John, in this letter of his, writes as a concerned father speaking to his dear children. And in this letter he is careful to prepare his dear children for how deceptive the world can be and how gullible and vulnerable we as humans are. Do not be tricked, he warns them. Do not make a deal with the world for you may lose out on what is precious and eternal for what is temporary and fleeting. Do not give into your curiosity or be deceived by the promise of pleasure or the lure of excitement that is so regretfully momentary. Instead, hold onto to the eternal prize that you have in Christ Jesus. Treasure the gift of Jesus. Love your God and devote yourselves to him who is so devoted to you. With words dripping with fatherly concern John writes to the children of God, ***"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."***

Through these words of the apostle, God cries out to us as well. Our loving God sees us. He sees the constant wave of temptation that comes at us day after day, he knows how weak and vulnerable we can be, and so he pleads with us. Don't be duped by the deceptive charms of the world. Don't lend your heart and devotion to its pleasures because the world wants your whole heart and your entire soul. Don't get sucked into this dangerous exchange that is disguised as some harmless game of life. Don't you dare put your eternal prize at risk for temporary pleasures! ***"Do not love the world or anything in the world.*** And then the LORD reminds us why choosing the things of this world is such a poor choice and why loving God and doing his will is better by far. ***For everything in this world – the craving of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from Father but from the world."***<sup>17</sup> ***The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.***

The things of this world are not from God. They are not good and lasting and eternal. Instead they are transitory, a mist that quickly disappears, and empty shell that ultimately leaves us disappointed and unsatisfied. Here today; gone tomorrow. Worldly

wealth and success come and go. A life of vanity and sinful pleasure prove to be shallow and empty. Even a life based on a mountain of accomplishments measures up short when our accomplishments are soon covered over by another or forgotten due to the relentless march of time.

Dear children of God don't make a deal with the world. Don't give into the allure, the excitement, the temptation that daily surrounds us. Don't love the world. Instead gladly do the will of the Father. Believe in him. Trust in him. Love God; for he is the source of all that is good. He is the creator who formed us and gives us true and lasting please. God gives us the gifts necessary to make a living. He blesses us with all that we need. But we do not love these things! We do not give our love and our devotion to the things that we have for these things are only in our possession because of God's good grace. The same goes for the people that are in our lives. We love them. We treasure our relationships with them, but we do not love the people in our lives more than God. Instead we love God and praise him for these people who are precious gifts from his loving hand. We praise him for sons, and daughters, and grandkids. We praise him for our spouse, our friends, our neighbors. We love God who gives us all good things. And we gladly serve him and listen to his Word and follow his commands and we live a life that gives him glory because we know that the world and everything in it will pass away, but the gift of salvation in Christ Jesus is eternal.

Your God loves us with an eternal love. He created you. He provides for you all that you need. He blesses you with things and people that bring joy to your life. And above all he saves you. God loves you, and in his steadfast love he is also careful to warn you about the dangers of this world and the weakness of our flesh. In love he sends you his Word and sacraments so that he may hold you close. He washed you in baptism, he feeds you in the precious supper, he nourishes and refreshes us with His Holy Word so that he may lead us through this life of temptation to the safety and peace of our eternal home.

Love and treasure the prize of eternal life that your God and Father has given to you. Be ready to fight against and resist the constant temptations that come upon you day after day. Understand that your faith has put you at odds with the ways of this world. Therefore, do not give into your sinful desires to make a deal with the world, but instead continue in your love of God. Praise him and trust him. Give your heart and your devotion to the one who is so devoted to you that he nothing only clothes and feeds you, but he came down to this earth to shed his blood and die for you. Daily commit your ways and your heart to our Lord, because you know that he is your God who loves you with an unending love and he has freely given us treasures in Jesus that will last unto eternity. Yes, Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your mind, because he loved you first. Amen.