



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

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1 John 2:15 "Do not love the world, not the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Our verse today sets forth this interesting concept of being in the world but not being of the world. We remember the famous John 3:16 passage that begins, "For God so loved the world..." And, here we find that we are "not to love the world." Seems confusing and contradictorily. The word "world" is being used in two different references. In John 3:16, it's talking about the people of the planet. God loves all of us. He sent Jesus to die for all of us. Here, in 1 John 2, the word "world" is used of the sinful side of things. James does the same thing when he warns us that friendship with the world is enmity with God. There is a dark side to the world. The world is moving in a direction away from Heaven. That's the stuff of our verse today.

A great illustration of this contrast is found in the story of hard rocker Janis Joplin. She made a name in the music scene in the late 1960's. She was the true image of a hippie. Sex, drugs and rock 'n roll were her life. She died of a heroin overdose in 1970 at the age of 27. She was young. She has been named in the rock 'n roll hall of fame. Her image has been an icon of the music industry.

What many people do not know is that Janis Joplin grew up in a small Texas community in a very typical home, with a mom, dad and brother and sister. Her parents were members of a local church of Christ. And, here is where two paths separate and our verse becomes so apparent. The world holds up Janis Joplin as one of the first female hard playing, hard living rocker. She is hailed as one of the first female lead singers. She sang and partied with other rock legends. And, yet back home, was a heart broken mom and dad who witnessed a living prodigal that had chosen the way of the world. The world does not appreciate nor understand the pain of parents who watch their children embrace the world and sell their soul to gain fame, fortune and success.

Every year, the Janis Joplin story is repeated in differing degrees in homes across this land. The young people pulled by the world and the call of the far country, leave home, leave their values and leave their God for the opportunity to "make it." And, the price they must pay, is their soul. The lifestyle of some professions is so counter to the values of Christ, that a choice must be made. The professional athlete, loved by the fans in the stands, often is faced with the tough choice of how to worship on Sunday when it's game day. A few have made it work. Many have left aside worship for the love of the game. A price was paid.

The music industry is hard to be successful and remain a strong Christian. The touring, the alcohol, the drugs, the lifestyle, the people associated in that industry, are not upholding the values of Christ. Some make it, but many have chosen the industry over Christ.

(OVER)

Many other professions are just like this. To be at the top, there is a price one has to pay. Often, that price involves leaving the values that you once believed and now embracing a lifestyle that's not compatible with being a Christian. On top of the world, but what did it take to get there? How many marriages were ruined? How many lies and deceptions were told? And for many, once they are there, they have so embraced that lifestyle that they no longer think much about the Lord nor eternity. They have reached what they wanted and they now live a secular life apart from God. Only occasional, usually at a funeral, will they pause and think about what they left and where they are going, but that thought is quickly lost in the world which they live.

Our verse today reminds us not to love the world, nor the things in it. This is a tough lesson for parents to instill in their children. The push is to go to the top, be the best. But what will it take to get there? Will one have to exchange his soul, as Jesus said, to gain the whole world? **Matt. 16:26** The push to make the most money and the push to play sports at all costs, comes with a cost. Some of these impressions come from the world. However, some start early and they come from the home. Parents make the decision to skip services for a ballgame. That decision teaches the young athlete that the game is more important than the Lord. Later on, when that person wants to play college sports or gets an opportunity to try to break in to the majors, worshipping on Sunday doesn't even cross his mind. He's all about the game and the game has replaced the Lord.

From our passage we begin to see some truths:

First, the world is going a different direction than I want to go. There is more to life than money, the game, and success. Our ambition is not to be on top, but to please the Lord. That must become a part of our DNA. When it's there, the decisions are easier to make. When it's not there, the Lord loses every time.

Years ago, I sat down with someone who was trying to convince me to become a salesman in his corporation. The talk was climbing the ladder. The talk was of money, trips and elegance. He asked me to list five goals in my life. That was easy. I wrote things such as preaching overseas, developing elders, and things like that. He read my list and said that I had written down the wrong things. He said, "I mean material things." We weren't on the same page and never did get on the same page.

Second, there is a contentment and a peace within the heart of a Christian that makes him satisfied. The thrill of being famous not only comes with a price, but it is shallow and empty. The child of God knows that he is going somewhere. He realizes that God is his Father and joyfully, he can sing, "This world is not my home." Don't you want to be famous, someone asks? No. I just want to go to Heaven. Wouldn't it nice to be rich? Compared to most of the world, I am very rich. And, more than that, I have riches that money cannot buy. To be forgiven by God and to be considered one of His children is far greater than having your name on a plaque and having people drool over you because they think you are somebody. My friend, Eugene, has dozens of preacher's autographs in his Bible. Every year he finds more preachers to sign his Bible. If he was to put that Bible on EBay, he wouldn't get any bids. The world doesn't know, nor does the world care about those names. But to the people of God, those names are special.

Third, all of this ends one day. The values of the world will come crashing in a dead end street. There is no way out. A life without God ends horribly at the judgment. To ignore God now will mean God will ignore you in eternity. The life of rebellion and hard living may be appealing to some, but it's selfish, and doesn't contribute to the wellbeing of others. The life of the Christian ends in the arms of our Savior. Choices now, determine our destiny later. It's not predetermined. It's not all set in stone. Every day we make choices. Live now to self or live now with God and later with God. So the man of the world who seems to have it all, when he dies, what will that have accomplished? Jesus already told us this story. **Luke 16:19-31** We know his designation, the rich man. He dressed in purple and ate well every day. He died. But that wasn't the end of the story. He opened his eyes and was in agony. No one to help him. No second chances. No warnings to others. This wonderful life crashed at the dead end street. He could have chosen God, but he didn't. He could have helped poor Lazarus, but he didn't. He could have done right, but he didn't. While loving the world, he seemed to be on top of it. He lived behind a gated house and seemed to have it all. In our times, his picture would have been on the front of magazines. His house would have been shown on TV. People would have flocked to be around him. He had it all, but actually, he had nothing. The purple clothes didn't help him when he died. The fine food wasn't there for him after he died. The gates didn't matter. The big house. The money. All of this ends one day.

Fourth, contentment is a hard lesson to live with. The world pushes us to improve and get more. You can't be happy we are told unless you upgrade. You must have the latest and the newest. You must circulate among the stars. Push, push, push, and drive, drive, drive-and where does that get us? Stressed. Worried. Fearful. Cranky