

## **The Love of the World Forbidden to the Saints of God**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Thursday Evening, March 3, 1859

(A Posthumous Sermon.)

"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. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." 1 John 2:15-17

The precepts of the gospel are, or ought to be, as dear to us as the promises; for do they not stand upon the same foundation? Are they not as much an integral portion of God's word? Are they not revealed by the same Spirit, written by the same inspired pen, and do they not form part of the blessed volume which we hold in our hand and have before our eyes? I think, if I may judge by my own experience, we some times pass by these portions of God's word. We try to legalize them; we do not see their connection with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we endeavour to perform them in a legal way, as though they were part and parcel of the law. We consider that if we acted them out we should thereby recommend ourselves to the favour of God. Many stay there all their lives. But after a time the Lord is pleased to break this snare by leading us into the truth of the gospel, commending its sweetness and savour to our souls, giving us a larger or less measure of holy freedom and spiritual liberty, whereby we begin to understand the gospel as a pure dispensation of God's grace. Now we lie under a temptation as to the precept. We make too little of it

by attempting to slight it; not to despise it—we cannot do that. But we see not at first its exact position in this revelation in the New Testament, nor do we recognise its bearing on the life of a Christian. After a time, however, we begin to see and understand something of its value. But from neglecting the precepts we may go on to breaking them, and by that means bring guilt and distress upon our consciences, and then we shall see how worse than foolish it was to neglect these precepts which God has revealed in the Scriptures as so many bars and hedges; then we begin to discern how these precepts are set to guide and keep the soul from slipping into those things which are grieving to the conscience and dishonouring to God's mercies. Then it is that we begin to love the precepts for the beauty and blessedness we see shining forth in them, and we desire to keep them—not because by keeping them we shall be kept from those things that dishonour God, but because there is a great reward in keeping of them, and it is a blessed thing to do those things which are pleasing in God's sight. What a precept we have here laid before us by the pen of holy John! What solemn warnings, and yet what gracious injunctions, and how he has set before us in the strongest way what the world is, the dangers of loving it, and the blessedness of the man who so far from loving it is separated from it and crucified to it.

In opening up these words I shall, as the Lord may enable me,—

I.—First endeavour to show, What the world is of which our text speaks; and John gives a clear and blessed account of what there is in the world and why you are not to love it.

II.—Secondly, The precept, which is that we are not to love the world nor the things in the world.

III.—And thirdly, The reason we are not to love the world *for* and *against: for*, if any man love the world it is an evident proof the love of the Father is not in him; and *against*, whilst the world is passing away, and the lust thereof, God's own testimony is that he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

*The world* is a very comprehensive expression. All men are disposed to assign to it a signification that may correspond with their innate fleshly desires. They do not see the world is, if I may be allowed the use of the expression, the antipodes of God. All that is of God is not of the world, and all that is of the world is not of God: that is, these two things are asunder, and you may as well try to reconcile heaven and hell, Christ and Belial, as an eternal God with the world.

By *the world* is not meant the mere creation that we see by day or look upon when the stars blaze by night—not the mere outward frame. The world is a far deeper thing than what our natural hand can touch or our natural eye see. We need not go far to look for it; we shall find it within. Each man carries a world in his own bosom. For what is the world? Is it not a collection of men's hearts? Take all the hearts in the breasts of all the men on the face of the earth and put them together, and this is the world. For every single practice of the world, everything that the world loves and pursues, you have in your heart, I have in mine. The world without merely carries into practice—cordially follows out that sin which is ever working in our breast. We need not, therefore, go very far beyond ourselves to know what the world is which we are not to love, for we shall find, if we have eyes to see what we are as poor fallen sinners, that we carry the world in our hearts. It requires no microscopic eye to look into these depths.

Well, what does John say about what is in the world? He says, "All that is in the world"—that evil that is apparent therein, that meets your eye and forms its prominent features—these are "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life," and he puts these three things together as though by naming them in this striking and separate form he would show the main things in which the world consists. By the term *lust* we do not understand the base *lusts* of the flesh that are more usually designated by it. "The *lust* of the flesh" embraces a variety of things, and has not merely that comparatively narrow meaning which people generally associate with the term in regarding it as one monstrous instance of depravity or one gross instance of the fall of man, that I need merely allude to because it is a subject so tender and delicate. There is included in the expression a great deal more than that. For instance—I dare say you may have felt it—the love of drink, the love of money, and the like. There is the love of indulgence—indulging the body beyond its due requirements; there is a feeding the flesh beyond what the flesh requires as its natural sustenance; and every act whereby you feed the flesh beyond what it requires is neither more nor less than the lust of the flesh. Whatever you take special delight in and indulge in as being eminently suitable to your natural taste, as something you seek pleasure from distinct from God, is the lust of the flesh. Everything and anything that pleases, amuses, delights, or interests your carnal mind distinct from things spiritual and divine—it takes a wide range—may be comprehended in the expression "the *lust* of the flesh"—"the *desire* of the flesh" or the risings up of the depraved nature which we inherit from Adam. Whatever this carnal mind of ours may desire, be it wealth, property, learning, riches, or anything that may gratify our carnal mind and give us a happiness distinct from God's presence, is "the *lust* of the

flesh." How subtle is this flesh! how deep! how continually putting itself forth in some desire, in some longing, in some wish, in some attempts to gratify itself! your flesh, the movements of your carnal mind, though men widely differ in their constitutions, inclinations, pursuits, objects of ambition, knowledge, and habits, though in all these men widely differ, yet from first to last it all amounts to the same thing, it is not of God, of his Spirit and grace, it is not spiritual, vital godliness, it is something belonging to the flesh, whatever this is, whatever it may be, it may be very elegant, very refined, very highly polished, varnished, and decorated, but it amounts to the same thing—the lust of the flesh. You may dress a corpse in satin, and put it into a coffin covered with crimson velvet, and then in lead; but it is a corpse still and must go into the same grave as the parish pauper. So your dress may be adorned and decorated, but still yours is the same flesh as that of the vilest wretch whose sins seem to be crying out to God for vengeance. When we say "the lust of the flesh" we do not merely mean the gross sins into which man may fall, not merely words even; but the very *desire* of the heart, the very risings, the very movements of the carnal mind. The very wish of the flesh apart from the sensual gratification of that wish—is a sin. The alienation from God, the breathings of the mind totally alienated from God, are evil. When we see what our flesh is, that is enough to make us astonished that we can be what we are! When we see that all our attempts, be they many or few, to subdue the flesh, mend it, improve it, sanctify it are fruitless, and our frame is as devilish as before,—our feeling all this is enough to cut down all the pride of man and make the most highly-favoured saint feel that he is saved in the same way as the vilest sinner.

And then there is "lust of the eye." What an avenue of evil do our eyes meet! How the eyes gather in sin with every look! It

is scarcely possible to open them without committing sin! We can hardly look a fellow sinner in the face without committing sin. I was going to say the eyes gather in sin, if I may use the expression, almost as the boys gather dung in the streets. Our eyes are such inlets to sin that we cannot open them without the lust of the eye being kindled. Now, the lust of the eye expresses something more than is often attached to its meaning, because the eyes are not only the inlets of evil but the inlets of knowledge, instruction, and many things that are naturally entertained. And what are beautiful paintings, landscapes, works of art, and all those things that men of ability and refined minds take delight in? What are beautiful buildings, fine architecture, handsome houses, beautiful furniture, dress (male and female) worn according to the fashion of the day—what are all these things but the lust of the eyes? Does not the lust of the eye include all this? That which the eye sees and lusts after is the commission of sin.

Now, surrounded as we are by sin in every shape, feeling as we do the workings of sin every hour and moment, how continually do we find this lust of the eye kindled by the objects around us as we meet them, and all this is of the world. So that a man may actually retire from the world, shut himself up from all society so as to be a hermit comparatively speaking, and yet all the time the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes may be working in him so highly that he is afraid his soul will be lost through their influence.

And then there is the pride of life. Does not this work in us? It is not confined to those who can gratify it—to the rich and respectable. It is not confined to those who live in good houses, to those who have princely means to gratify it. I have said sometimes that the tramp that goes from door to door has as much pride in his heart as the peer who rides in

his carriage. There is a pride working in his heart as much as in the greatest noble of the land. Not that those who have the means to gratify their pride are not exposed to the greatest temptation, for there lies the great peril of riches. The poor man may condemn those who are placed in a higher position; but place him there, and he would perhaps be worse than they; but his poverty keeps him, under present circumstances, from manifesting it. Still this is no excuse. If a man have means that is no reason why he should use those means for the gratification of the "pride of life." There are the poor, the children of God, upon whom the money may be better spent. Therefore, there is no excuse for a man because he has such means to indulge the "pride of life."

What a triple enemy against a child of God! What! an arduous battle he has to fight against this threefold foe! If he is not exercised with the lust of the flesh he may be exercised with the lust of the eyes; or if not with the lust of the eyes there is the pride of life: so that behind and before, on the right hand and on the left hand, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—this triple foe—meets him at every turn. And who has eyes to see them? who has a conscience to feel them? who knows anything of the spiritual conflict with this triple foe? The man and the woman only who have the life of God in the soul. I was once much struck by the remark of an eminent servant of God. He said, "Every man was overcome by sin, but a child of God." And it will be found so. Sin will prove victorious over every man except a child of God; whatever his profession may be he will be overcome by sin who is not delivered by the grace of God. And the child of God has a hard battle. He does not come clean off. He escapes as it were by the skin of his teeth. Many a bitter cry does he put up to the Lord to keep him from evil that it may not grieve him. He stands at times

on the brink of the precipice, and it seems as though hell were under his feet. But he is kept by the power of God. The devil deals hard with the child of God—more hardly with him than anybody else. Sin may be compared to a river which will flow very quietly till there is a dam placed across the stream. It is then that the strength of the river is seen. So as long as there is a free course for sin all goes on very quietly; but only let a man try to keep out sin, then he will find out the strength of sin, and so the devil seems to work more upon a child of God than upon others, because he knows he has these safely in his grasp, and therefore he lets them alone.

Well then, to come to the precept: we are not to love this world. How plainly it speaks, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are not to be gratified. "Well but," you may say, "my heart loves them, and how is my heart to be divorced from that love? You lay the precept before us; but how are we to perform that precept?" By the grace of God. By the power of God in your soul. He can and will give you a principle—a holy principle in your heart that will make you hate the world, and at times hate yourself. When you feel the world working in you he will give you a godly abhorrence not only of the world without in which you are to live your appointed time, not only of that which lies around you; but you will see what a passing thing the world is, and you will view its hideous blackness in the sight of an holy God, and he will make you to see, and feel the lust of the eyes so that you will be afraid to open them lest it should be an inlet of depravity in your soul. You will see the workings of it; you will see how opposed it is to the lowly majesty of the Lamb of God; and there will be a time when you will feel a solemn distaste against the lust of the eye.

Then there is the pride of life. You will cry to the Lord to



preserve you from its power and dominion, and in God's strength you will be willing and more than willing to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, and to put off the old man and put on the new. Then, when your soul is in any way favoured with the love, grace, goodness, mercy, and favour of God by holy influences and divine teachings, a solemn distaste is brought into your soul of all those things which are contrary to the grace of God. And this is the only way whereby we can keep the precept. We might impose upon ourselves a task or precept. We might say, "I will go through this day without giving way to the lust of the flesh or the lust of the eye, without loving the world or the things in the world." We might make such a resolution, and the first step we might take after coming down stairs, the first act might overthrow it all. The first thing that occurred might drive away all our resolutions, as the strong wind drives away the chaff. It is not in this way that we are to keep the precepts of the gospel. It is by the letting down of the goodness, mercy, and longsuffering of God in the soul, it is in his strength and not in our own, it is in what he is pleased to communicate by his own Spirit that we can fight this battle and come off more than conquerors.

III.—Then I pass on to show the reason why we are not to love the world, and the evidence *for* and *against*.

Now, first we have this demolishing truth, for I answer it is a demolishing truth: "If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him." If you love the world and the things that are in the world with a real, hearty love, if you feel the world to be your element and home, and you love it as men in general do love it, who are altogether in it, you carry in your bosom a demonstrative evidence that the love of the Father is not in you; for the two spirits, the two feelings, the two experiences are so distinct. It must be one or the other.

You will either love the world and the love of the Father be not in you; or the love of the Father be in you, and then you must not love the world. But we must take the words in a spiritual light. We are not to suppose that the spirit of the Father is so continually in a man's heart that he never loves the world. But when the love of the Father is in a man's heart, and he feels the life and voice of God and is under the influence of the love of the Father, then he does not love the world. And then, again, when the love of the world does get admission into his mind so as for a time to get the better of his soul, then it seems as though it drove away the love of God, that holy dove, who will no longer tarry where the love of the world is; for he is driven out of his hearth and home by the coming in of a flood of evil. So that if the love of the world be in a man's heart it is an evident proof that the Father is not in him. But we are not going to say that the saint of God never feels any love to the world; for, if we were to lay it down in a broad positive way that there never is in the heart of a saint of God any secret love to the world whatever, if we were to lay it down as a broad rule that he is never entangled in the lust of the flesh, in the lust of the eye, in the pride of life, but is delivered from them all we should then come to the point—*perfection*. We do not set up a child of God as being perfect, as having a complete victory over sin. He cannot be perfect in the flesh nor could we set him up as such when God's word gives us no sanction thereto. Surely Paul was not here, in this state of perfection, when he wrote the 8th chapter of Romans, surely not David when he wrote the 65th Psalm, and who would dare to say that the love of the Father was not in Paul, and that it never touched the heart of David? yet the one cries out,—“O, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of sin and death?” and the other says,—“Iniquities prevail against me.” Where would be your sighs, your groans, your conflicts, your struggle, your battle, if sin or lust had not its power, or you

never were tempted or entangled in any kind of sin or lust, temptation or trial whatever. But, thanks be to God, there is at times a victory given over all our lusts, sins, and passions, and that victory flows from the love of the Father. When this love is let down into the soul with any gracious going forth of affection, then and only then, is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life subdued, put under our feet, and turned and kept out of our soul. This is what the saints of God are brought experimentally to feel, and this is that which makes them look the more earnestly and feelingly to the God of all grace to fight their battles, and bring them off more than conquerors. But holy John gives us another reason why we should not love the world, and O! what a reason it is! He says—"The world passeth away, and the *lust* thereof." How truly evident this is! How the world is passing away! Every day is bringing us nearer to our appointed end, every day sensibly shortening the days of our pilgrimage here below. "And the world passeth away." How we see neighbours, persons whom we know by name or character, suddenly cut off, and how every day we see their remains carried to the cemetery! But, where are they? They are passed away. "And the word passeth away and the *lust* thereof." Where is their lust, their feastings, their huntings, their fishings, their parties, their social pleasures, as they term them? Where are they? All gone! Passed away! When the man is put into his coffin, and the mould drops on the coffin lid, and the turf is shovelled over his bones, then all is gone, and nothing remaineth but that all his sins are to be hung round his neck like a millstone to drag him down to eternal perdition. All that men love or enjoy, whether it be in the coarsest pleasures or those of the highest refined intellect, it all passeth away with him that taketh delight therein. "But he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Not merely *knoweth* it, but *doeth* it; he that has a principle of holy obedience whereby he knows the will of God and does it,

he shall abide for ever. He that has a mind and will to believe in his person, to hope in his mercy, and is enabled to bring forth the fruits of the gospel. And, oh! what a struggle it is to do the will of God! To see what God's will is in matters that crucify the flesh, and to do it in spite of the flesh, relations and friends! In order to effect an obedience to God's will we have sometimes to go out as Abraham did from our father's house, and to turn our backs on friends as Moses did when he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. This was their evidence, they did not talk about the will of God, nor make a great boast of it; they simply did it. To do the will of God was their desire. They cried, "Show me thy will, let me do that will whatever it may be, whatever it may cost." So our cry should be. Our desire should be to live as the martyrs of old lived, though it cost them their natural lives, though they were burnt at the stake in cruel torment because they saw the will of God, and did it.

Now when we measure ourselves by those holy men, when we put our knowledge, our church membership, our experience, and what else we have beside theirs, when we put ourselves into the true scales, what necessity do we see for crying to the Lord and begging of him that he might work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure; for we feel that all religion is empty talk and vain chatter except there be a doing the will of God. To talk about religion is easy enough; to profess is easier still; but to do the will of God with a single eye to God's glory, with a living faith in him, and feeling that the eye of God is upon us, and to know that will, and knowing the will of God to do it, though it cost a right arm or a right eye, yet to do that will, there is the difficulty. Will men leave the world and the things of the world to do the will of God? They are going after the will of the flesh, and what the world can give them, and not after what God commands them in his holy word. But the saint of God says,

"The world is passing away, and the lust thereof with it; I have to die, to meet eternity, to stand before an awful bar; then if I am in the world and doing the will of the world, how shall I meet this awful hour? But if enabled to do the will of God with a single eye to God's glory, and under the smiles of his grace I shall abide for ever; and when death comes it will but be to me the entrance into the portals of eternal bliss." Oh! the saints of God who have gone before us! How they did the will of God. How they bled as well as suffered! How they struggled to know that will and to perform it! How they laboured against wind and tide, against the snares of Satan and inward besetments! How they groaned and laboured, suffered and died! Where are they now? In the presence of Jesus, beholding him for whom they suffered and laid down their lives. Where are the others, those that loved the world and the things that are therein? Where are their houses? Where are all their earthly joys? Where are their companions? They have passed away! And so it will be, all, one after another, will sink into death and pass away, and all the things that engage the minds of men, they will all pass away, they will all come to naught. But here and there will be found this man, this poor man, and that woman, that poor despised woman, and this poor creature, bowed down with a sense of weakness and infirmity, struggling in the weakness of faith amid the vast crowd to know the will of God and to do it; these will then shine like the stars in the firmament. Oh! to be among that number, not with the crowd who are passing away with the world, but among the favoured few, the children of the Most High, who seek to know and to do God's will in the utmost depths of their heart, as being a will so acceptable to him! May our lot be among those who fear his great name, who shall abide for ever, and who shall be found at the right hand of God when the world shall have passed away, and the lust thereof, and the globe on which we stand shall present one confused mass of black ashes.