

## LOVING GOD AND WORLD

My oldest son has long ago achieved an MBA from Yale University, while he did his undergraduate work in Economics. He describes economics as a matter of “on the one hand” and “on the other hand.” The theories within the discipline of economics cannot easily be caught in straight-forward formulae; they need always to be hedged by that one hand or the other.

If that is so in the human endeavour of economics, then we should not be surprised if the truths about God cannot be captured in straight-forward formulae either that capture all there is to be said about the Creator of all of this wonderful reality in which we live.

Isaiah 55:9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

When you read theology, sometimes you get the feeling that theologians have it all under control. It all seems so certain and straight forward. They know it all. Well, I've been a theologian for many years now but I prefer the formula my son used for econ: one/other. Things about God can hardly be captured in simple formulas.

Last week I spoke on the beautiful creation. How God revels in what He did and expects us to do the same. That's the positive appreciative tone on which the Bible starts and it is amazing that it has escaped so many of us. I did give a brief explanation for our failure to catch that positive tone. ANYONE REMEMBER?..... But, while it is very true and very important that we have such a positive appreciation, that is not all there is to be said. That was the “on the one hand.” This evening I will give you “on the other hand.”

Our concern in this mini-series is THE BIBLE IN THE MARKET PLACE. Yes, I am not simply talking about nice ideas. I am talking about ideas, concepts,

views, understandings that make a difference in our lives, in the way we conduct ourselves in society, in the market place. The Bible is not merely about good ideas; the Bible is about obedience to God, about godly living, about salvation that begins here and now in THIS world and will carry us through right into eternity

So, then, on to “on the other hand.” The other side of last week’s coin. We read from

Rom 1:21-25

James 4:4

I John 2:15-17

Do these passages not contradict Gen. 1 with its talk of a beautiful world that God declared Very Good? Such passages are of course a major reason why we have not always known what to do with Gen. 1.

I asked you to vote last week and many of you did not raise your hand. One of you explained that she did not raise her hand, because it was not a case of either/or; it was, she said, a case of God loving BOTH! I confess that I did leave you with some confusion, perhaps, but it was meant to be a humorous little trick to leave you not just hanging, but to encourage you to mull over the issue during the week. Perhaps even discuss it with others who were here. If that happened, well, then I achieved my goal. But I do want you to know that I was aware of the one-sidedness of both of my statements--just as I was aware of both the truth and the one-sidedness of my lecture.

Loving the world = enmity and hatred to God. That is the thrust of today’s passages. That’s pretty strong language. No wonder many Christians have shied away from the world. No wonder many Christians think that to really serve God you had better work in the church or its institutions of outreach, mercy, development, healing, education. That’s where you get paid to obey God. You

get paid to love Him and you are somewhat protected from the world. It puts a bit of a shield between you and that hated, hostile world.

But you know, you can never get out of this world. For that world is right inside of all of us. Even if you could take yourself out of the world by choosing a religious occupation, you cannot take the world out of you. Some years ago, a young man in Edson brought up in a family business, confided in me that he wanted to get out of the temptations of his family's business. I asked him what he proposed to do. He replied, he would go into the ministry! I then strongly warned him that the world he was seeking to avoid, would follow him right into the ministry. There is no escaping it. You are part of it; we all are. To be sure, we are its crown, according to the Bible, but we are part of it and cannot separate ourselves from it.

Why does the Bible say that God declares the world very good and that He loves is enough to give up his only Son to redeem and restore it and us. And then James and John turn around with such a negative thrust. The reason, of course, is that something terrible happened after creation that changed everything in the very core of our existence. Through Adam and Eve we picked up a fatal virus that has changed things very deeply and that even would have even separated us from God. In fact, it did separate many people, if not most, from God.

These are the people who have turned their backs on God, their creator. Paul put it well in Romans 1:21-25.

*They exchanged the glory of the immortal god for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. They exchanged the truth of god for a lie and worshiped and served created things. Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. They claimed to be wise, but they became fools.*

Now, Paul was not talking about exceptionally foolish people. He was talking about ordinary people--the entire human race, including those who gave themselves credit for being wise--the Ph. D. and everyone else. The respectable people in society. The kind of people you live with every day. The kind of people you work with, you socialize with. The Bible calls them stupid, foolish. Why? Because they have turned their backs on God and worship things found within creation. If in the past, they worshiped graven images, today they worship money, power, cars, sex, career. They all replaced the living God for such things. And that is such a widespread phenomenon that it has become ***the major characteristic of the human race.***

Instead of loving and serving God, they love something within creation. Can be anything. It changes from culture to culture and from age to age. Today in Canada it is freedom untd, unbridled by any law of God. It is human rights shorn of any sense of responsibility to others, let alone God. In Canada, it is money and sex, glitter, fun, power, drugs, you name it. That's what the world is all about. It has taken on a different nature from what we see in Genesis, a negative one, one that leads to destruction. Just look around us in the West End, the product of this godless culture is all around us.

It is THAT world, THAT foolish, self-willed world that both James and John are telling us not to love. To love THAT world, to be part of that world, to live like that world, to share it ambitions and goals, THAT is indeed enmity with God. How is that world characterized by John? In I John 2:16 we read:

***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.***

Did you hear that description of that fallen, disobedient, foolish, downright stupid world: It is characterized by sinful cravings, by lust of the eye, boasting and

bragging re. what he has or does.

THAT is the world or community we are not to love. To fall in line with that community is nothing less than to hate God and to become His enemy.

That means loving that world more than you love God. It means you go by its dictates--in your life, in your occupation, in your social life, in your academic pursuits, *in the market place*. That makes you God's enemy. Following the secular line of Canada, leaving your religion at church or at home, following the dictates of the latest trends. Ah, it looks so smart. So sophisticated. It looks so with it. So modern.

But the Bible calls it *stupid, foolish*.

THAT's what we are not to follow. Instead, we are to follow God and His dictates, His laws. Of course, the world will dismiss this as hopelessly conservative. They are sure you will get over it or otherwise your kids. In the meantime they will try to contain you and tell you to keep religion out of it.

Instead, the Bible calls us on every page to follow God, to obey Him and His laws. He knows how things will work, how we will prosper in the long run. He knows, for He has made it all.

And you know what, once you love God, then suddenly the world becomes something else for you. You don't lose the world. You get it back in a new way. You don't have to make the choice between God and world. Once you follow God, you will follow him in this world and the world becomes yours in a new way. Now it is once again God's theatre for you, where you serve him in all you do.

It is people who force a false choice on you: either God or the world. Godless people. People who want to push God to the margin or out altogether from the market place. It is those foolish people, those with futile minds, the stupid ones,

who want you to leave Him out and to love the world without Him.

God's challenge is different. Take him and then repossess the world in a new and more profound way. It is not matter of either or. If you choose the world, you lose God. If you choose God, you have both. But now without all those things that lead to destruction. Now without that boasting, without those lusts, without those ambitions and false gods. Now human rights along with human responsibility. Now you're given new emotions and new motivations that will turn life into a positive experience for you and for those you touch in the marketplace. All of a sudden the assumptions and the laws the world applies to the market place are now recognized for the foolishness they represent. Now your presence in the market place becomes a blessing for those you deal with. Now you begin to act like a true and responsible citizen of God's world.

All of a sudden people are no longer objects for you to use for your purposes. No longer merely human resources, but people made in God's image, people for whom Christ died, people among whom you promote justice and truth.

There is an old traditional hymn that begins: "*Take the world, but give me Jesus.*" That is a terrible heresy. Take Jesus and then take the world as well. Then you will have a human right to this world in the name of the Lord. The world without your old cravings, the world without the lust of your eyes, the world without your bragging and boasting. Now it's the world *with* all that God offers you. It belongs to you if you know you belong to God. That's *your* world, for God the creator has given it to you to take care of in Gen. 1 when he said we must tend the garden of His creation.

Next week, we will ask some questions and make some initial suggestions as to how this might apply to the market place. There is that market place full of workers and professionals. For most of them its' that world of lust and ambition, of dog eat dog, of lawyer against lawyer, businessman vs businesswoman, union vs employer and vice versa. Everyone against everyone. A world of

adversaries.

We hate that world of lust and ambition and boasting, but we love the world that God created and its laws. We step into it with His guidance and new cleansed ambitions and purified goals that are in line with His intentions and that promote true peace, justice and prosperity.

So, this week step into that world, having left behind the ambitions that all these foolish people with futile minds are guided by. We step into that world afresh

Hate that world of lust and cravings. Love that world shorn of its foolishness and be His representative in the market place, His image in such a way that people see Him in you.

What a wonderful world and what a wonderful challenge. Many of you have come from Asia and other parts of the world for an education. Well, you have come to a nation and city that knows its way with the world, but it is a city and country that has largely followed the rest of the world and wants to be secular: Keep God at the margin, but don't bring him into your education or profession.

I am telling you this evening: Don't buy into that kind of so-called modern wisdom. It is foolishness and futile. Don't admire it. Weep for it. So much potential. So much creativity, but all for foolish and futile ends that brings no certainty and that creates increasing poverty, oppression. Increasing street people and addicted. All that glitters is not gold.

In this week practice this new attitude towards life. If you are God's, this world is yours. Claim it without shame in front of all these secular blind fools around us.

Take Jesus--take the world. Take this city of Vancouver. It is yours if you are God's. Pray John 17:15-18.