

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

August 15, 2021

“Love the Creator, or Created?”

Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30 with King’s Kids.

NEWS

Miss Nell’s Memorial Service, Saturday, August 21, 2:00

Carolynn’s Baby Shower, Sunday, August 22, after church

Church Camp over Labor Day Weekend (T-Shirts & Signup end next Sunday)

Wednesday Nights at Alêtheia begin soon - get ready - answer the survey...

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I JOHN 2:15-17 ~ It begins with a negative absolute _____ “Do not love.”

Love here is Agapê in verb form, ἀγαπάω (ä-gä-pä-ō). The word cannot have a _____ meaning just because it’s in the negative.

Only _____ can give us the sense in which words are used. The word “World,” here has a negative connotation, but even if it were positive...

The ultimate result of sin is _____. If you think about it, death is decay. Life is a state of death. That constant decay of progressive death results in pain and fear.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

Beyond that it can never work. Fear _____ love. Isn't it ironic that love for the world is a love for what is dying, a love resulting in fear?

We must not _____ to love anything not encompassed within _____ to love God and one another.

Surely there must be more than just those _____ things. What about...

This is not just about our _____, but our about underlying motivations.

No one can choose to unconditionally love God and the _____, while also choosing to unconditionally love their own life... (John 12:25, Colossians 3:2, etc.).

John then describes the world to help us see the absurdity of loving it. "Lust of the flesh." Lust is ἐπιθυμία (ě-pē-thü-mē-ä), Are you enjoying the world as you love God and His people, or are you loving what the world can do for your pleasure? Priorities yes, but more than that, the foundational basis of _____.

"Lust of the eyes." has to do with what you've _____ to obtain, but now want.

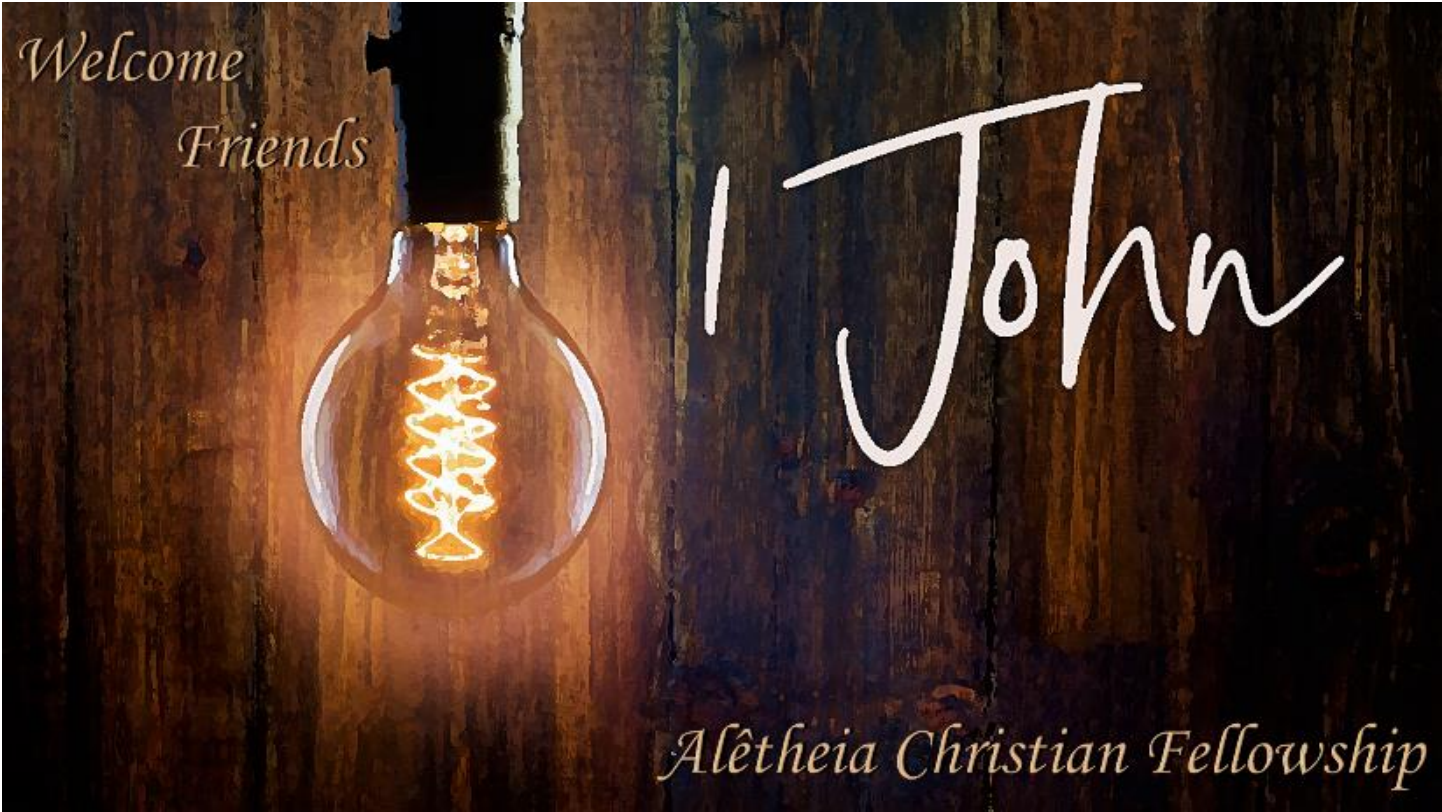
"Boastful pride." The ἀλαζονεία (ä-lä-dzö-nē-ä) "of life." Our assumption that we _____ things.

The world and all the things of the world are _____.

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____



I John 2:15-17, 15Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

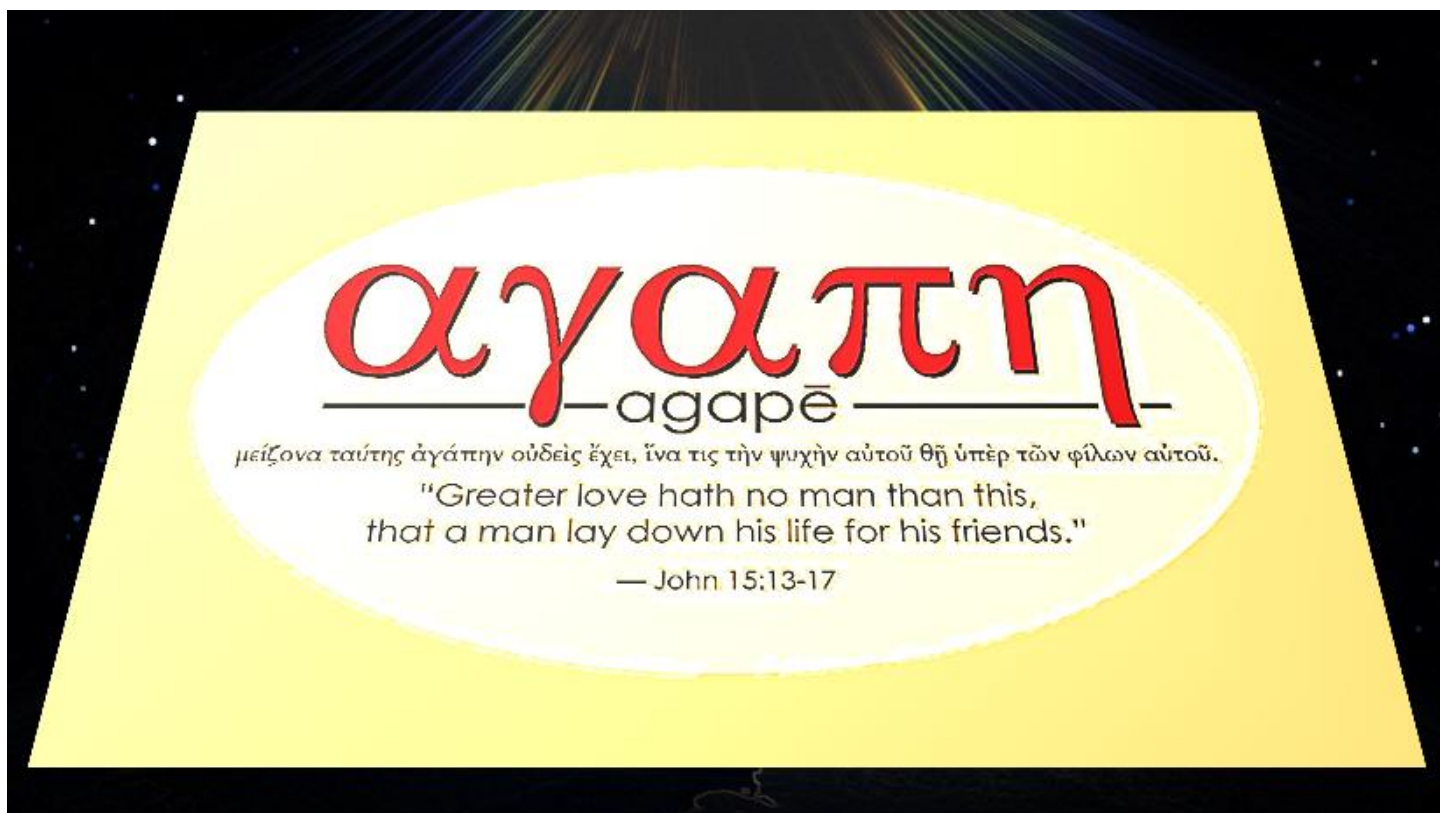
“The one who does the will of God lives forever.”
Anyone having the slightest clue about the Bible has been exposed to that simple idea... “Do what it is that God wants you to do, and you get to go to Heaven.”



I doubt most people understand it as well as they actually must in order to activate it in their life, but the statement is both basic and familiar to nearly everyone. Generally, it is understood as an intuitive human concept. You scratch God's back, and He'll scratch yours. That's all wrong of course and I'm sure the reason is most people assume they get it without putting in the effort to actually get it... To correctly understand that simple statement, "The one who does the will of God lives forever," is a bit trickier than one would think. Alexandra Fuller said, "The most basic human impulse is toward entropy and laziness. The less we have to do to grow spiritually, the more likely

we are to do it.” We’ve done everything we can to make Christianity as simple and unobtrusive and easy and undemanding as we possibly can; is it any wonder we see so few Christians who act like Christians? We’ll see entropy again, but to get the phrase about the “Will of God” and to fully implement it properly in one’s own life, requires hard work - a lifetime of it.

It is the positive way to state things and we’ll dig into it further, but one way to do that, is to investigate the negative side that John led off with starting in verse 15.



It begins with a negative absolute command “Do not love.” We’ve heard all about love in this Letter, but this is the first time that we are ordered not to love.

Love here is Agapê in verb form, ἀγαπάω (ä-gä-pä-ō). It is the same as in verse 10 where it says, “The one who loves his brother abides in the Light.” The word love cannot have a different meaning just because it’s in the negative than it does elsewhere in this Letter. John never once used any other term for love than Agapê in this particular book. He was fully capable of doing so - He used other terms for love in his other writings more than 40 times, but here in this Epistle of Love, not once is it anything other than Agapê and not in any way does John signal a different meaning for that word.

This is a key to understanding this passage that most people entirely overlook. When John says, “Do not love,” he means do not choose to love unconditionally - that’s what Agapê is - an unconditional choice to love.

God has chosen to love you unconditionally. That means that despite your offense against Him, He

unilaterally paved a way to right-relationship with you by paying for your offence with His own blood.

God has chosen to love all people unconditionally in that way. Forgiveness, reconciliation, fellowship, and adoption are all potential for all people as the door is open from God's side of the equation. Whether a particular individual enters through that provided door of right relationship is a different question. Either way though, God has provided a door, because He has chosen to love the world unconditionally.

That's what Jesus has called us to do - He has specifically called us to be like God in that we each would choose to unconditionally love Him, one another, and the world.



That seems like a problem. “DO NOT love the world,” it says. Unless I’m missing something that’s the opposite of what God does and what Jesus wants us to do. “The world,” and “The things of the world,” aren’t necessarily good, or evil. God created the world and said that it was good. We just alluded to the fact that “God so loved the world that He gave” everything to save “Whoever” would be saved. Only context can give us the particular aspect or sense in which words are used. “Would you like a date?” Am I asking you out, offering you a Middle Eastern fruit, or defining an event on a calendar?

The word “World,” in the present context, definitely has a negative connotation, but it’s important to realize that even if it were entirely positive it wouldn’t change the basic premise. The good “World” that God initially created along with the good stars and planets, the good land and waters, the good fish and birds, the good plants and animals, and especially the good people, would still constitute the same problem if it were loved in this unconditional sense.

Even the best feature of the world can be evil when it usurps our love for God and for His church. That’s important because it isn’t just the evil aspects, or elements that represent a danger... Even wonderful things can be distractions to the detriment of better things and better things to the detriment of the best things.



Here, we are talking about the world corrupted by sin. The ultimate result of sin is death. If you think about it, death is decay. That death leads to decay is obvious - that decay is also the thing that precedes and leads to death is the part we often overlook. Everything is in an ongoing state of decomposition and that's before death takes final hold. As such we can think about life as a state of death. The world and all the things of the world are presently dying. Death is everywhere and it holds sway over everything. Well, my friends, that constant decay of progressive death results in pain and dread.

Death may define mortal life, but it does so in the form of suffering and fear. This is the human experience - it is completely normal, and it is very pessimistic. Where is there any hope? How can we go forward living such a life? We substitute. We say, "Look on the bright side, you have all this "World" and "The things of the world." We say, "Maybe today isn't so great, but maybe tomorrow will be better," maybe something will happen, and you'll have more of the "World" and more of "The things of the world." It's a distraction from the best.

Beyond that it can never work. There is no escaping death and so there is no way of escaping the fear that this present reality creates. There can be no love in fear. Fear murders love. Isn't it ironic that love for the world is a love for what is dying and what can only bring death and so can only bring fear? The fear that murders love. Love of the world inevitably leads to hate. You cannot love that which ultimately results in hate and simultaneously love that which ultimately results in perfect love.



The negative command means that we must not choose to love anything not encompassed within choosing to love God and one another. Trust me when I say that those are the only two things that a Child of God can choose to love, and they must be chosen in the order specified. There is nothing else - there is no one else. All of the entirety of the Law, and the Prophets, and the Writings, are contained in those two statements. All of Christianity is likewise summed up as well. In fact, as we've seen many times before it can actually be summed up with only the second commandment because the first is implied within and enabled by the First and Greatest Commandment. The

second is explicitly commanded by the Object of the first and is a direct consequence.

You might object and say surely there must be more than just those two things. What about taking care of yourself and your non-believing dependent family members? What about loving the lost enough to share Jesus with them? What about enjoying the created world God has given to us?

My friends all of those things and more are not only contained within the first two, but are rendered appropriately within that context.

What I mean, as an example, is that you must spend a fair amount of time, energy, and resources on yourself. That's time spent thinking, planning, and doing. That's energy expended exercising, growing, and repairing both physically and emotionally, as well as mentally and spiritually. That's resources consumed to feed, clothe, protect, comfort, and encourage you as a person in order for you to obey the two commandments. In order for you to be "One who does the will of God," you must be able to be a doer.

In other words, you cannot live the two Commandments properly without caring for yourself in these ways. Here's the beauty of it... When we care for ourselves with the goal of better living the two commandments to love God and then love the church, we keep our self-focus from becoming too self-focused. When you work on you, in order to better love God and love His kids, you have the proper balance that is appropriate and pleases God.

It's the same with all the things that you could think up... Evangelism is done out of a love for God and the church. When a person rejects my testimony about Jesus I need not be offended, because I didn't tell them for me, I told them for love.



When I'm trying to teach a person something and I recognize that they've lost interest, I say to myself, what I used to say out loud. "I'm not talking for my good, I already know the information." And so, without any negative emotion I stop bothering them. It's okay if someone else doesn't want what I can offer - that's their choice. The way to avoid frustration, impatience, irritation, and all the other harmful responses, when someone rejects what you're trying to share with them is to always remember why you're sharing in the first place. Share because you love God and love the church. Let the other person decide how they want to respond.

John, in this passage, is trying to help us with not just our priorities, but with our underlying motivations.

After the negative command, we have a conditional argument. We start with a proposition and then get the consequence. The protasis is “If anyone loves the world.” “If,” is the conditional part, “If,” anyone.

Anyone is all-inclusive. It’s kind of a cool emphasis. John’s only talking to Christians right now, but he says “If” any human at all, loves the world as I just commanded them not to love the world, then they are in the same exact boat as anyone else going into the Lake of Fire. There’s only one boat destined for that lake. Put another way, the only requirement to be a person who does not have the love of the Father in them, which is a way to say the person who is not a Christian and is on their way into the outer darkness oblivion, is to be a person who has chosen to love the world. That’s all it takes to join the God-haters in their boat is to, like them, love the world. This cartoon then has a new meaning, doesn’t it?



Love the Creator, or love the created

In that light, this passage makes more sense. No one can choose to unconditionally love God and the church, while simultaneously choosing to unconditionally love their own life... That's how Jesus put it, "The Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world," said, "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal" (John 12:25). Paul stated it, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2). John says it, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

That last bit is the apodosis of the argument... “If” this, then that. It completes the condition set. If you choose to unconditionally love what is other than God and His children, then His love is not in you. This is called a zero conditional because it is a pure certainty without any other possibilities. If A, then B. No way out of this one and so you might conclude that any person in that boat is not a Christian at all. Well. it’s more complicated than that.

Remember when John was talking about the “Love of God” being made perfect back in verse 5? Here it is less explicit, but within the context it means the same thing.

It is “The love of the Father,” once again. Here of course it is negative. That love is not in the person who loves the world. Whenever you see this phrase, or the similar phrases like the “Love of God,” the “Love of Christ,” or the “Love of the Spirit,” in the Bible it is usually a plenary genitive.

As a review, such phrases can be subjective or objective. HCSB has, the “Love FOR the Father is not in him.” The NIV, NIV, CJB, and Passion Translation

are similar. Our love for the father is objective. God's love for us, in this case would be subjective and based on the sentence structure would mean that His love for us is unmanifested.

Enter the plenary genitive. It doesn't just mean both - it means a synthesis of both that is more than the sum of those two parts. God's love poured out for and into us then manifests from us as first and foremost a love for Him and then secondarily as a love for other Christians... That is what is missing from a person who chooses to instead love the world and the things of the world. Horst Balz said it well, "Love for the Father is only a reflection of the love which comes from the Father." That love is absent when it is replaced by a love for the created over the Creator.

John then describes the world to help us see the absurdity of loving it. "All that is in the world," that's everything that exists in the physical plane of reality - all of it can be boiled down to three things. Here's the important caveat: Everything falls into one of these categories for the person who loves the world. For the person who loves God and the church it need not be that way.



Okay what are the three categories? “Lust of the flesh.” It is ἐπιθυμία (ě-pē-thü-mē-ä), a passionate desire. The basic idea is to burn. To burn with lust, or longing, or craving. It is to yearn for something, and it can be a good yearning as Jesus used the word it in the Upper Room when He said, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

Usually, it’s not good, as here, reasonably translated as “Lust.” The lust of the flesh has to do with excessive pleasure, comfort, and pampering. It is to focus on self-indulgent activity. It can be anything. The balance

between lustful excess and reasonable enjoyment has its roots in love... Are you enjoying the world as you love God and His people, or are you loving what the world can do for your pleasure? Priorities yes, but more than that, the foundational basis of motivation.



The second thing is the “Lust of the eyes.” Where the first has to do with what you can obtain the second has to do with what you’ve yet to obtain, but now want. It comes in the form of temptation to seek a new acquisition and goes all the way to the resentment of that thing being out of reach.

Again, a Christian can have reasonable goals, but they must be grounded in love for the right things.



Finally, it is the “Boastful pride.” That is the ἀλαζονεία (ä-lä-dzö-nē-ä). A word that refers to the attitude of arrogant superiority that emanates from the extremely wealthy, influential, and powerful elite. That has little to do with the majority of John’s audience, especially his original audience. That’s why he added “Of life.”

That simple addition turns this into a trap for all human beings making it about the natural tendency we all have to assume we deserve things.

We deserve respect and become angry when we don't get it and why? Pride. We deserve to have people agree with our opinions and become combative when they don't and why? You guessed it.

When we love God and from that, love the church as our priority and as our basis for being we boast not in ourselves, but in Christ Jesus.

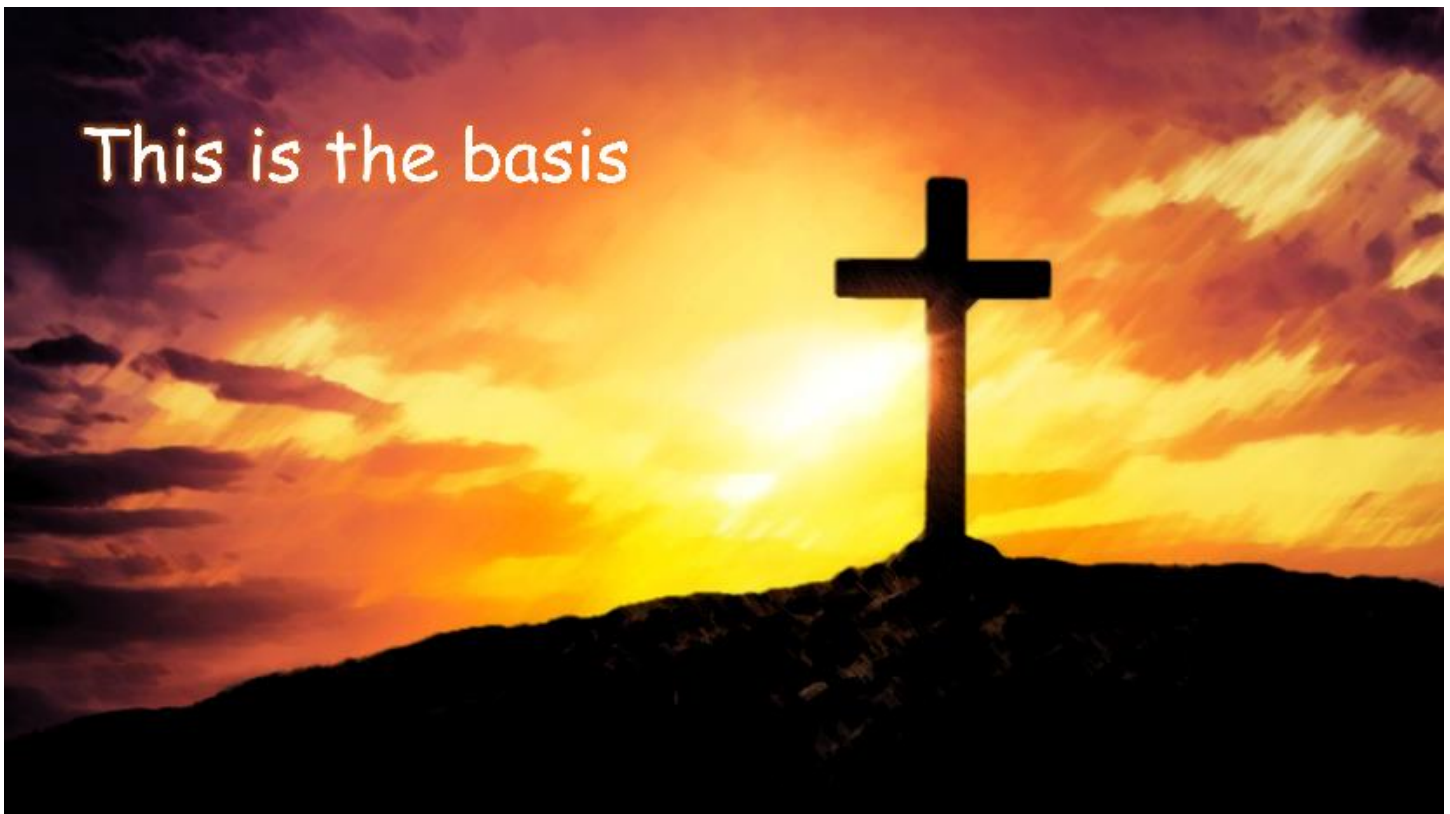
Of course, none of those negative categories have anything at all to do with the Father - they are all the result of sin corrupting the physical - they are all part and parcel with the world.



John gives us another reason love for the world is dumb. The world and all the things of the world are temporary. Why would a person try to distract themselves from death by loving death?

We've talked about it today in those terms. At other times we've talked about the concept in terms of the second law of thermodynamics where the concept of entropy was first widely recognized. It states that heat never moves from colder to relatively warmer. Never. Likewise, the order of a system never increases. That simply means that everything in physical existence is dying, both individually and as a whole.

Everything around us is temporary, except love. Viktor Frankl was a psychiatrist and a Holocaust survivor. In his amazing book “Man's Search for Meaning,” he said that when everything is taken and I mean every possible thing, and when there is only a skeleton held together by skin and death is a whisper away, the one thing that transcends that is love.



Love is eternal. Love is eternal because it emanates from God. Love is at its most basic level relational. The only thing that you get to take out of this life and into the next are the relationships forged in His love.

To love the world and the things of the world - to love life and liberty and freedom and honor and dignity and any other completely transient thing is a human folly. Ask the nursing home patient how much “Boastful pride of life” he has... Ask the privileged high society diva about to swallow a whole bottle of pills about the “Lust of her eyes.” Ask the prisoner of Auschwitz or Dachau about the “Lust of his flesh.”

Everything will eventually be stripped away from you except that which actually matters... Love, Love, Love.

The Apostle John got it and that's why all he talked about in his extreme old age was love... The same thing can be said for My sister Miss Nell.

If she were here today, she would tell you to love. Love God, love each other. Do everything else in your life from that foundation.

It is the “One who does the will of God who lives forever.” The one, means anyone, but also only those. Anyone can be one, but only those so choosing, get to live forever. There isn't a backway in.

“Does” means to actually do. It’s not an academic exercise, nor a philosophical proposition, nor a game to be played at times, nor something for others to do. This means that the natural state of your being is favorably disposed to God’s Will done in you - accomplished in your life daily.

The coolest part is the verb “Lives.” It means that the living began when you chose to love God unconditionally and because love and the relationship it generates lasts forever, the living is never interrupted.

There is for the Christian no death to fear. Love, my friends, love.