

LIVING FOR GOD IN AN

UPSIDE

A STUDY IN THE EPISTLE OF I JOHN

DOWN

WORLD

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Lesson 2

LIVING FOR GOD IN AN UPSIDE DOWN WORLD



It's hard to recognize that the world is upside down,



unless you you've had the privilege of seeing it the way God purposed.

What are God's expectations of people who follow Him – even as they live in an upside-down world?

➤ Clearly the **pattern of life in the world** is contrary to the very nature of God

Thank God He has given us the **ability to be victorious over a culture** that is **counter-Christian** – for foundationally the culture is **unsympathetic** to biblical values.

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Prayerfully we will find the answer to the “how to survive” in our study of “Living for God in An Upside-Down world.

John wrote this simple little letter to help people commit their lives for a virulent expansion of their walk with Christ.

The antagonist to our peaceful existence with God in this world is evinced in the prominent prevalence of deception, lawlessness, anger and confusion.

- The world is truly off-balance from the moral equilibrium prescribed in creation

Craig Gay, in his book, *The Way of the (Modern) World (1998)*, draws a parallel between the fixation on self and the consumer culture.

He noted the “obvious affinities that exist between therapeutic and individualistic sensibilities and consumer capitalism.”

- I.e., when there is a strong desire to possess something or even to spend money, there is no satisfaction until an acquisition is made

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Therefore, we should not be shocked to find ourselves in a culture where self is elevated, deity is weakened to just an “overseer”, and consumerism is glorified.

○ It is here when the gravity of the slippery slope takes its greatest effect.

In just five short chapters, John uses the word “**world**” over twenty times – **kosmos** (an apt and harmonious arrangement or constitution).

○ It denotes “what is well assembled or constructed from its individual parts.”

The term has a wide range of uses:

- ▶ **The Universe in terms of space**
- ▶ **The circle of the earth; hyperbolically “far and wide”**
- ▶ **The aggregate of things earthly; “worldly affairs”**
- ▶ **The inhabitants of the world**
- ▶ **An ungodly multitude**
- ▶ **Aggregate or general collection**

In the Johannine gospel, the cosmos is the universe of which:

- a) Christ is **the light** (John 8:12) and to which He comes or is sent (3:17; 10:36; 11:27, etc.).
- b) Christ and his kingdom are not of it (8:23; 18:36).

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c) In divine love he has come to save the world (3:16-17).

d) As the Lamb of God, he takes away its sin (1:29).

e) But the cosmos knows neither him nor God (1:10; 17:25).

f) Outwardly it goes after him (12:19), but it really meets him with hatred (7:7).

(Theological Dictionary of the NT, abridged edition, Copyright © 1985 by Eerdmans Publishing Company.)

Having an affinity for or “loving the world” means being devoted to the world’s treasures, philosophies, and priorities – which are all transient.

God tells His children to set their priorities according to His eternal value system; and we are to “seek first” His kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33); for no one can be devoted to both God and the world at the same time (Matt. 6:24).

Extrication out of and separation from the influences of the “world” is what God told Israel to do as they entered his land of promise.

- He wanted to spare them the evil system controlled by Satan that would lead them away from worshipping Him

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John Calvin in his writing *Institutes of the Christian Religion* said, "The human heart is a perpetual idol factory" [Institutes I.11.8]

"So, it goes. Man's mind, full as it is of pride and boldness, dares to imagine a god according to its own capacity; as it sluggishly plods, indeed is overwhelmed with the crassest ignorance, it conceives an unreality and an empty appearance as God. To these evils a new wickedness joins itself, that man tries to express in his work the sort of God he has inwardly conceived. Therefore, the mind begets an idol; the hand gives it birth."³

We can make idols out of anything – any passionate desire of our hearts that is not put there by God for His glory can become an idol (I Cor. 10:31).

Loving the world is idolatry (I Cor. 10:7, 14); and while we are commanded to love the *people* of the world, we are to be wary of anything that competes with God for our highest affections.

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In *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest* (2017), John Walton suggests God's command for Israel's invasion of Canaan was more about dismantling of their idolatrous community than just ending their lives.

The world and its systems, motivations and directions is what one leaves when they come to Christ; and [Isaiah 55:7](#) says that one who seeks God and His ways involves forsaking one's own ways and thoughts.

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan pictures the believer's position as having "his eyes lift up to heaven," holding "the best of books" in his hand, and standing with "the world as cast behind him" (p. 34).

There is an on-going conversation, a multiplicity of workshops and no shortage of surveys relative to the issue of declining attendance and growing disillusionment with the church.

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We hear it all the time in this “world gone wrong”

➤ ***I’m done with church.***

- You and I are the Church we don’t go to church. You leave the church any more than the church can leave you.

➤ ***I don’t really need to go to church...my relationship with God is personal.***

- The centrality of the Church is Jesus. Therefore, abandoning church is forsaking Christ. There was not church before it was established on the bedrock of His identity.

➤ ***I’ve had it with organized religion.***

- How can you not like an organized church, but demand an organized society? Who would like to live where there is no structure and anarchy?

➤ ***The church is a man-made invention, not God’s idea.***

- Being a part of church fellowship and going to church is not your (man’s) idea and neither is disassociating from it.

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Eph. 2:19-22 So, *you are not foreigners or guests*, but rather you are the *children of the city* of the holy ones, with all the *rights as family members of the household* of God. ²⁰*You are rising like the perfectly fitted stones of the temple*; and your *lives are being built up together* upon the ideal foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, and best of all, you are *connected to the Head Cornerstone* of the building, the Anointed One, Jesus Christ himself! ²¹**This entire building is under construction and is continually growing under His supervision** until it rises up completed as the holy temple of the Lord himself. ²²This means that **God is transforming each one of you** into *the Holy of Holies*, His dwelling place, through the power of the Holy Spirit living in you! (TPT)

There is a relevant passage of scripture in I Timothy 4 where Paul alludes to the notion of the “mystery of iniquity” already working in the world (II Thess. 2:7), opposing the “mystery of godliness” in **I Tim. 3:16.**

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The chapter is interesting because Paul deals with the spiritual life and labors of the Pastor or spiritual leader/ teacher; and he notes three qualities:

- V 1-6 He must be **preaching** the word
- V 7-12 He must be **practicing** the word
- V 13-16 He must be **progressing** in the word

As he is writing to Timothy, the Pastor of the church at Ephesus (I Tim. 1:3), Paul's concern still was according to his caution to the elders when he saw them for the last time (Acts 20:29-20).

- They had been warned about the possibility of false doctrine weaving into their faith economy

In fact, throughout Paul's letters, **the Spirit speaks** "in stated words" (**expressly**) that the church will see both a **falling back** (*withdrawal—aphistēmi; I Tim 4:1*) and a **falling away** (*apostasia -- forsaking of doctrine; II Thess. 2:3*).

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In I Tim. 4, he points out that the cause for the falling back was not the “growing intelligence of scholars” but the **satanic influence of demons** so that professed believers become cold to the truth of God; forsaking what they had been taught

I Tim 4:1-2 Now the Holy Spirit has explicitly revealed, in the latter times **some shall depart (af-is-tay-mee) from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; ²Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron (Cauterized Consciousness)**

Author David Callahan, in his book *The Moral Center* (2006), argues that the problems for most Americans are not abortion and gay marriage but rather issues that neither party is addressing—the **selfishness** that is careening out of control, the effect of our **violent** and **consumerist culture on children**, and our **lack of a greater purpose**

Each of these causative identifiers deserves a moment of biblical observation, especially since there are verses that speaks to our present age (II Tim. 3:1-7)

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Paul in his final epistle warns Timothy that difficult conditions (*perilous times*--II Tim. 3:1-7) with no visible way of relief were imminent [shall come; unexpectedly appearing] in the “**last days**” (time preceding the return of Christ-- II Pet. 3:3; Jude 1:18)

II Tim. 3:1-7 “But you need to be aware that in the final days the culture of society will become **extremely fierce in perilous times (kairos)**. ²People will be **self-centered lovers of themselves** and **obsessed with money**. They will **boast of great things** as they strut around in their **arrogant pride** and **mock all that is right**. They will **ignore their own families**. They will be **ungrateful and ungodly**.³They will be **without natural affection (astorgos)** **addicted to hateful and malicious slander**. **Slaves to their desires**, they will be **ferocious, belligerent haters** of what is good and right. ⁴With **brutal treachery**, they will **act without restraint, bigoted** and **wrapped in clouds of their conceit**. They will **find their delight in the pleasures of this world** more than the pleasures of the loving God. ⁵They may **pretend to have a respect for God**, but in reality, they want nothing to do with God’s power. Stay away from people like these! ⁶For they are the ones who worm their way into the hearts of vulnerable women, spending the night with those who are captured by their lusts and steeped in sin. ⁷They are **always learning but never discover the revelation-knowledge of truth.**(TPT)

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- A. Conceit (*Selfishness*) Lovers of themselves is counterfeit to what love is meant to accomplish—for the love of self is intended to be visibly exercised in our love to others
- It begins with one receiving love from God and seeing themselves thru the lens of His love.
 - This results in others being blessed with a genuine love that flows through us
 - True love does never focus on self as the end target – for love has a flow to it.
 - Whenever love gets backed up or clogged, the more it fizzles to get out
 - Love is meant to be a flowing river, from God to us and out to others.
 - “**Lovers of themselves**” is the translation of the word *philautos*(*fil-ow-tos*), that combines two Greek words: (1) **Philos** – meaning friend and (2) **Autos** – meaning self
 - Since *philos* is a word intending love to be directed from one friend to another, it is not something one has with themselves
 - The natural flow of *philos* is hijacked by *autos* which is directed inward, thus producing a life that is focused on “what is in it for me” (narcissism)
 - The culture is becoming more narcissistic because of the missing factor of **true love**

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- Self-love is the modern-day fig-leaf which covers our brokenness and shame
 - **II Timothy 3:1-7** “For men shall be **lovers of their own selves** (this character was attributed to heathen men in Rom. 1:29)
 - ▶ **covetous** (*wanting for themselves; money or prestige loving people*)
 - ▶ **boasters** (*bragging on themselves about what they do not possess*)
 - ▶ **proud** (*arrogant concerning themselves showing themselves better than other men*)
 - ▶ **blasphemers** (*revilers; speaking evil about others –choosing to be by themselves*)
 - ▶ **disobedient to parents** (*trying to raise themselves and devoid of manners*)
 - ▶ **incontinent** (*can't control themselves*)
 - ▶ **fierce** (*in-humane to other; bigoted*)
 - ▶ **high-minded** (*in love with themselves*)
- [UNTHANKFUL – no gratitude – UNHOLY – irreligious –TRUCE-BREAKERS –implacable]

B. Consumeristic– [LOVERS OF PLEASURE]

- The text of II Tim. 3 says the people would be motivated by not only animal lusts, but passion for change in doctrine and manner of teaching

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[FALSE ACCUSERS – slanderers – DESPISERS – hating good – HEADY – impassioned]

- The running after fashionable men and fashionable tenets, drawing them in the most opposite directions [ALFORD].
- People who criticize the Church are being consumeristic in their attitudes; and to some extent, churches cater to consumerism—often to our detriment.
- Unfortunately, much of the way Church is conducted is a replication of the marketing principles in the world.
- A consumeristic Christian is easily encouraged to consume something only if it suits them, and then discard it without a second thought (and then buy more!).
- In a recent article in Christianity Today, it was reported that music is a priority to only 14% of the Church, yet we make it a major component of our worship.
[It's Not Enough to Broadcast a Service. Churches Need to Foster Community. August 17, 2020]
- And if there ever was a consumeristic opportunity it is now, for 30% of viewers who participate in virtual services watches multiple worship experiences each Sunday
[<https://www.pewforum.org/2020/08/07/attending-and-watching-religious-services-in-the-age-of-the-coronavirus/>]

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- Yet the **missing element** in all the viewing is personal connection and fellowship [CHURCH WORSHIP AND ATTENDANCE IS NOT EDUCATIONAL – IT IS RELATIONAL]
- Notice how advertising attempts to convince us that we NEED this product to get us to buy it. The consumer mindset confuses our wants with our needs.
- More often than not, that product fills a WANT rather than an [actual need](#).

C. **Confused** (*having a lack of a greater purpose-- ever learning, never attaining perfect knowledge*)

- **The text says they will be -- GREAT IMITATORS** –having a form (*morphis – appearance; formula*) of piety; with no sanctifying influence]
- **Saints of God**, in the last days there will be plenty of religion, but it will be a **mere imitation** – demonstrating a form of godliness without respect for the Person of God
- God is the life-changing power which presents and promotes faith in a person's life and without a solid relationship to God's truth, it becomes easy to depart from Him
- The departing from the faith that Paul predicted in II Thess. 2:1-3 is upon us today, yet there is still plenty of religion

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- **II Thess. 2:1-3** Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ² not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. ³ Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the **falling away** (apostasia) comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition (NKJV)

Disastrously, those turning away from **God's way** under the **worlds sway**, may become the catalyst for many other Kingdom and societal ills – not the least of which is preventing someone who is on the cusp of making a decision for Christ, to delay their decision

Believers don't have to settle with the disarray of wrong living apart from the way of God, for the key to overcoming the chaos is *Fellowship with Christ*

- Closeness in fellowship with Jesus, increase the possibilities of enjoying relational benefits

Principled living is afforded through fellowship with Christ, and this is John's cardinal proposition in I John

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