



**SERIES: Authentic Christian Community / 1 John, wk 2**

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**Message Title: Torn Between Two Lovers Pt. 2**

**Release Date: Monday 2/10/2020**

**For 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. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts;** (NASB 1 John 2:16-17a)

**...lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, boastful pride of life**—let’s take each one of these phrases.

What does he mean by **the lust of the flesh**? If we define that as all kinds of wild, immoral behavior, kind of this immoral debauchery that defines the world in the gutter, most Christians would say, “Yeah, that’s really bad, should be avoided, but that’s not me.” But I don’t think that’s the definition of the term at all. As a matter of fact, there’s long been confusion around: what does the term **flesh** mean?

I think the best way to understand it is from the Old Testament, and specifically, understanding the purpose of the *flesh*, as it relates to the mark of the covenant — circumcision - in Genesis, Chapter 17; understanding the story that God promised Abraham: that through Abraham would come the Messiah, the Savior, who would save them from their sins. From Genesis 3, we know that would be the seed of a woman, meaning a human being. From Genesis 15, we know that seed of a woman would actually be God Himself, and it would be His blood that would be shed to atone for their sins. So we know that this miracle Person would actually be fully God, fully Man. That’s the promise, then, that was made to Abraham.

I believe that Abraham and Sarah struggled with the thought that they could, in their own power, produce this child. I think Adam and Eve struggled with that. As a matter of fact, in Genesis 4, when Eve has a child, she basically says, “I did it,” and there is a clear sense in which she thinks she pulled it off. I think Abraham and Sarah struggled with the same thing. I think you see that in the story of Abraham and Hagar. When Abraham and Sarah aren’t having children, Abraham says, “Hey, we can pull it off—call Hagar in here.”

The idea of circumcision is saying that this will be from God and God alone. The promise is the seed of a woman; therefore, it would travel through the male organ. So the whole idea was, the removal of the flesh of the foreskin would say, “This is symbolic of the fact that you, in your own power, in your own strength, cannot pull this off. You cannot generate a God Man.” And so the removal of the flesh was saying, “You can’t do this. This will be a miracle from God.”

And I think then you see that pattern throughout the Old Testament. The **flesh** there, then, is symbolic of that which we can do in our own strength, in our own power. If you take what’s called the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, and you take the Greek word *sarx*, which is the word for **flesh**, and you see how that was used in the Old Testament, it’s never used for sensuality and debauchery. It’s always used consistently with this

idea of, what we can do in our own strength and power, what we are limited to in our own humanity. So I think the Septuagint helps confirm that is the correct definition. So **the lust of the flesh** is basically what I can do myself. All religion flows out of my flesh. A lot of very good behavior is done in the flesh. It's that which I can do myself.

So then what is **the lust of the flesh**? To understand that phrase, you have to think back to Genesis, Chapter 3. The offer made by the evil one, who again is the architect of this system, was to Adam and Eve: you can be your own God, and you can decide for yourself what's right and wrong, what's good and evil. The greatest temptation that we face as people made in the image of God, is to think, then, we can be our own gods.

Basically, the storyline looks like this: in Genesis, Chapter 2, Adam and Eve were created to have a relationship with God, and out of that relationship they found their significance and they found their value. Every person in this room has a strong, strong need for a sense of significance and a sense of value. We were meant to find that in our relationship with God and out of that, life is lived. But in Genesis, Chapter 3, sin enters into the picture, and sin cuts us off from a relationship with God. So now, Adam and Eve must figure out how to find significance and value apart from God. That's where the architect of the world-system comes into play and says, "You can do it yourself. You can do it yourself, based on your own performance, on your own ability to achieve. You be your own god and, in so doing, you will make yourself significant; you will give yourself value." And that then defines the operating-system of the world.

Now understand this: there is nothing wrong with performance. As a matter of fact, I would say God calls us to perform at our best for His glory. The problem is, when the performance becomes the basis of my significance, the basis of my value, where I'm now my own god, that's the sin of idolatry. And I've said to God, "*I'm* going to make myself significant; *I'm* going to give myself value." So if it's performance-based, then how does that work? And the answer is: the only way it can work is on the basis of competition and comparison. My performance has to be measured, and so it's going to be measured up against you. So I determine, "How do I compete with you? How do I compare with you?" That's why, on any given day, our self-esteem can go way up and can go way down. It just depends on who I am comparing myself with, and what I'm comparing. So we get into this performance-based system that is now the definition of my significance and my value.

We still have the question: how is the game scored? How do I put points on the board? How do I demonstrate to people that I am significant, that I do have value?

That's the second phrase—**the lust of the eyes**. Eyes represent covetousness. It isn't limited to money. It's anything that I see and I want, in order that I can compete better, in order that I can perform better, in order that I can raise my significance and I can raise my value. So you think about the ways in our culture that we communicate to one another that I matter; I have value; I have arrived - check me out. It's not complicated. It would be money; it would be stuff; it would be titles; it would be positions; it would be education. It would be how we look; it would be talent—you know—music and athletics. It's whatever I use to say, "Hey, I matter! I'm significant. I have value. Check me out!" If you don't believe this is true, go back to a class reunion. That's all those are about—figuring out what everybody else does for a living, how much money they have, what kind of a car they drove in.

But even us as parents: you have one child who's a brain surgeon and one child that is a janitor. Are you more proud of one than the other? Do you introduce one differently than the other? Our culture says you should. We keep pushing our children into careers that will somehow make *us* look better because they will make more money; they'll have more status. But it isn't the passion of that student's heart. We do this all the time in our culture. This is why we buy houses we can't afford. This is why we drive cars we can't afford. This is why we have hundreds, thousands and thousands of dollars on credit cards that we can't pay off. This isn't just about budgeting. This isn't just about simple math skills. This is about my significance; this is about my value. I have to have that house. I have to tell the world I'm somebody. When my self-esteem is in the tanker, I have to swipe that card. This isn't about budgets; this isn't about money. This is deeper. That's why it's so hard to stop. Because every time I swipe that card, I'm saying, "Hey, look at me. Check me out; I do have value; I do matter." This is **the lust of the eyes** — it's how the game is scored.

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### ... the boastful pride of life, (Vs. 16b)

Interestingly enough, this word **life** is not the Greek word *zoe* where you are talking about Jesus as the Word of Life. That's talking about life in its fullest, deepest, richest sense. This is the word *bios* from which we get our word biology. It's just the very basics of life—what it takes to survive. It's the very essence of life in the sense of survival. John's very careful with his wording here. The **boastful pride of life** is, "Hey, check me out! I survived—and *I did it my way*." At the end of the day, what do you have? "I spent my life according to the operating system of the world, and I survived! I had a big house and a really nice car. I had lots of money in the bank. People really thought I was something." But what difference does that make? At the end of the day, we can all say in unison, "Big deal!" Trust me, a hundred years from now, nobody's going to care how big Frank Sinatra's house was. What is virtuous about doing it *my way* if, at the end of the day, my way is the wrong way. **The boastful pride of life** is saying, "At the end of the day, this system never delivers the goods; it's always destructive."

But this is critical to understand! It's always destructive because it was intended to be destructive. The architect is the evil one who longs to destroy your soul. The system was intended to fail — that's the whole point! *There is a way that seems right*. It seems right because the culture is applauding. The culture is saying, "Man, that's exactly the way you live life." But, at the end of the day, there are never any winners. If I feel good about myself, it's because I've compared myself to you, and I think I compare better. Therefore, I'm filled with arrogance — which is always destructive. Or I compare myself with you, and I don't think I compare very well, so my self-esteem goes in the tanker — and that's always destructive.

How many people, if you were to be honest, would say you struggle with a low self-esteem? You know why that is? I'm sorry, but it's because you're worldly to the core. You have bought into a value system that says, on the basis of competition and comparison, you are not matching up. Therefore, you should think poorly of yourself. It's the intent of the system to destroy you, and, unless you change systems, it is going to destroy you. *While you are sitting there thinking these low thoughts of yourself, God is on the other end of the scale, celebrating the wonder of*

*you as He has made you.* But you don't see that, because you've bought into the operating system of the world.

This is what leads people into mid-life crisis. I'm halfway through my life and I'm not significant; I don't have value; I'm not keeping up. And so we kind of go through this crisis of, "What now?" This is why our senior adults and our elderly fall into despair and depression, because, according to the operating system, when you can't perform, you have no significance; you have no value; you have no worth; and they feel that in the deepest part of their being, and so they have this despair and depression.

It's why we struggle with performance-anxiety — because no matter how good I was today, what about tomorrow...and what about the next day? It's relentless...and there's always somebody better. But I can't slow down, because what's at stake is my significance. What's at stake is my self-esteem, so I keep cranking it out, and I feel it, and it leads to my anxiety; it leads to my fear; it leads to all these problems that began to define our life, as it slowly destroys us.

The text says this value system **is passing away**—meaning, at the end of the day, it doesn't hold up; it doesn't work; it doesn't deliver the goods. It always destroys. This is why some people actually get upset when we talk about money. Something deep inside gets them really worked up, because, deep within, what they are thinking is, "You are asking me to give away part of my significance. These are points I can put on the board and you are asking me to give them up? I'm not keeping up the way it is, and now you are asking me to give up points?" We'll never be generous: we'll never be generous with our time; we'll never be generous with our talents; we'll never be generous with our treasures. As long as we've bought into this operating system, I can never really love someone, because I'm competing with everyone. Even within the marriage, it becomes a competition; it becomes a comparison. There isn't the freedom to just love—because of this sense of trying to find who I am, what gives me value, what gives me significance—leaving us with the question, "Is that the only option?" And the answer is, "Of course not." He says:

**...but the ones who does the will of God lives forever.** (Vs. 17b)

**The one who does the will of God** taps into this life that is eternal, this life that defines God. Now it's what John's talking about in the whole letter — that it's basically talking about this economy of grace, this operating system of grace. It's the polar opposite of a performance-based system. It's on the basis of what Jesus has done for me, not my performance - that's religion, which, by the way, religion is just taking the operating system of the world and inserting God into it; it's just the exact same thing. But what God offers us, is a system where He says, based on what Jesus has done on the cross for you, that you receive, by faith, God's forgiveness, which then includes an invitation to a passionate love affair with Him.

Now I'm back to Genesis, Chapter 2. On the basis of Jesus' performance on the cross, I can now have a relationship with God, and my significance and my value flow out of being rightly related to God — and out of that, now I choose to live my life. Suddenly everything changes. I'm no longer defined by the stuff of this world. I'm no longer defined by my performance and my houses and my cars and my stuff. I'm defined by being rightly related to God and, since it's on the basis of His grace, it never goes up and down. It's constant, because it's rooted to the character of God.

I would suggest that frees you up to perform at a higher level, because now your sense of significance is not at risk. That is secure in your relationship with God. It sets me free to have the courage to live by faith, and to fulfill the calling that God's put on my life. Suddenly I'm set free to actually love you. It's no longer a competition; it's no longer a comparison. I don't have to compete with you. I don't really care how I match up with you. It isn't about that anymore. I am actually set free just to love you, and to give myself away, and to celebrate you, and to cheerlead you, and to be happy for you, and to live the life that has defined God forever.

Over the years I've done a lot of funerals. I always gather with the family and ask, "What would you like to remember about the one who has passed?" Never — not one time — has anybody ever said, "Make sure you mention he had a really big house. Make sure you mention that he had this much money in the bank." I've never had anybody say that. There's something about that moment when we understand, deep down, that stuff doesn't really matter, does it?

Your default setting — my default setting — is the operating-system of the world. Unless I choose to operate according to a different system, I will operate according to the system that will ultimately destroy me. This one thing we know for certain: **I can choose to live my life my way, or I can choose to live my life God's way but I cannot live it both ways.** There is a choice — a daily choice — that must be made. "There is a way that seems right, but the end is destruction." But Jesus also said, "There is a road; it's a narrower road and there's going to be fewer who find it." But I'm telling you, it's the road that leads to life—the choice is yours!

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Years ago, I had a young man that I actually really liked. I did a lot of things together with him, but he so struggled with his own sense of significance and value. I remember when he left to go to college, and years went by, he came back to visit, and he told me that he decided he was going to pursue becoming a lawyer. I knew he had flunked out of college. I didn't see that that was realistic and I remember asking him, "Why do you want to be a lawyer?" And he looked at me, and he said, "I want to come back to a class reunion, and I want to prove to them I'm not a loser." We talked a lot about how that day is never going to come - he's never going to find the satisfaction his heart longs for that way - but I just couldn't get him to listen, and years later, he ended up taking his own life. He was so wrapped up in the value system of the world, trying to find his own significance and value. That's what John says. This is a value system that is highly destructive. It's why so many people struggle with their own sense of value and worth. We talk a lot about struggling with a poor self-esteem, but sometimes we don't realize the reason we feel that way about ourselves, is because we've bought into the world's operating system. The freedom is found in being rightly related to God, finding our significance and value in Him.

John tells us, you can't love both the Father and the world. You simply can't have two lovers. I try to imagine what it would be like, to come home one day and say to my wife, "Patti, honey, I love you, but I also found another lover, and I've decided to have two lovers." "That's not going to work." **You can't have two lovers; you have to choose.** As you choose, remember the words of John: He **who does the will of God lives forever.**