

Lesson 1: The Selfishness of Sin

There is a principle which governs the heart of fallen man. Satan loves it. The world system, which is under his authority, walks according to it. Our flesh, which is of the world, cannot escape it. We love and serve the world by means of our flesh. **I John 2:15** explains that we are to love not the world. It is for this reason that we are commanded instead to walk by the Spirit of God and not according to the flesh (**Galatians 5:16-18, Romans 8:1-2**).

Turn to I John 2:15-17 and read aloud

In **I John 2:16** the identity of the principle that governs the world is revealed. This verse explains, “all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.” When Satan tempted Eve with the apple in the garden, she fell in these three ways (**Genesis 3:6**). When Satan tempted Jesus, he tried to appeal to Him in these three ways, yet our Lord remained without sin. These three concepts all have something in common. They are all conduits of self-centeredness or self-love. This is the governing principle of the world: that we should live for ourselves. It teaches us to embrace our lusts and that we should seek to exalt ourselves, and look out for our own interests above others. Even Richard Dawkins, a well known atheist and author of the book, *The Selfish Gene*, acknowledges selfishness as the governing principle of man’s nature. However, he glorifies self-centeredness and attempts to excuse mankind’s devotion to self by attributing it to genetic influences. (**Psalm 10:13**).

The self-centered will is in direct opposition to the will of God. Naturally Jesus’ primary requirement for discipleship is that one should therefore deny himself (**Luke 9:23**). John starkly contrasts these two concepts in verse 17 of the passage we read aloud. The purpose for which Satan tempts us to self will is that he might keep us from the good and perfect will of God. What is the general will of God for all people?

Read Matthew 22:36-40 aloud.

The commands that Jesus utters are meant to inform us of God’s greatest desires for mankind. God deserves to be loved and esteemed as Lord and King over the people He so graciously and lovingly created. God created people in His own image and He loves them, so when we seek to love ourselves over others and refrain from serving them above ourselves, we vicariously offend the God who gave them their being.

It is the selfishness of sin which makes it sinful. Food and the ability to eat it are God-given. However, eating to please oneself more than God becomes gluttony, anorexia, bulimia, and countless other dietary sins. Intimacy in the confines marriage is yet another blessed and beautiful gift from God. Nevertheless, this sacred act has destroyed countless lives when misused and abused for no more than fleeting pleasure.

“Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (**Ephesians 4:26-27**). When Jesus was angry, it was either because someone sinned against God or His neighbor (**Matthew 21:12-13, John 8:1-7**). He never got angry when people sinned against Him (**Luke 23:34**). Another good example of this concept is when Rahab hid two of God’s people in her home and said she didn’t know where they were (**Joshua 2:1-6**). In **Hebrews 11:31** we find that, “by faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.” She was justified by faith, not her lie; however, her lie was in no way self-centered, but rather Christ centered and therefore was not sin. It takes wisdom and discernment from God to know when to follow Rahab’s example, as it has potential for being used as an excuse for sin. Smuggling the word of God into countries where Bibles are not allowed is a contemporary example of this concept. People must say they have nothing illegal in their baggage when asked upon entry into a country that is closed to God’s word.

Trying to show people how unselfish you are is selfish. You are attempting to please men rather than God with false humility, which is one of many manifestations of pride. Pride can also be thinking you are better or worth more than other people. This type of pride can be described as jealousy or greed. What you believe in your heart about yourself in relation to God and others is what truly matters, not simply what you know you should believe. Our goal in life should solely be for God to be glorified and others to be blessed in Him. We should want God to glorify Himself not only in our own lives, but also in the lives of others. We should not seek leadership opportunities and other positions with even a hint of the desire to exalt ourselves above other people.

What then is our conclusion? We must die to our old man; our flesh; our selfish nature, and be resurrected with Christ daily (**I Corinthians 15:31, Romans 8:11**). From moment to moment we should be checking our intentions for the day. Am I in the will of God in this moment? Would Jesus do this? Would He speak like this? Would He think like this? Would He dress like this? Would He eat like this? Would He spend like this? Would He listen to this? Would He watch this? Would He enjoy this?

We must acknowledge the selfishness in our hearts, confess it, and repent of it. God will continue to remove it by His Spirit and His word, through trials and tribulations, if we continue in this practice. If we want to be filled more with the Holy Spirit, we must first be emptied more of ourselves (**John 3:30**). Let this be the cry of our hearts, not so that we can be known as great people, but so that God can be known as a great God.

-All verses in NKJV