

# Do As I Say And Not As I Do?

Sermon, May 16, 2021

Texts: John (3:16), 17:6-19; I John 2:15-17

*"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein." we read in our Call to Worship. John tells us in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." The same apostle John tells us in his first epistle, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love for the Father is not in him."*

Does anyone see a problem?

Is he saying, *"It's all right for God to love the world, but you had better not!"*? Are we not to love what God loves? Does John have the Heavenly Father acting like an earthly father and saying, *"Do as I say and not as I do?"*

I don't think so.

Two points that might help resolve this apparent inconsistency: First, what comes to your mind when you think of the opposite of love? You might think, "Hate." I suggest that the real opposite of love is **indifference**. Indifference implies the absence of love. When someone is indifferent to something, intentionally or unintentionally, that person is saying: *"This is not significant enough for me to care about."* When someone is indifferent to someone, intentionally or unintentionally, that person is saying, *"You are not important. I don't care about you, at all. I don't care what you do. You are not significant enough for me to be bothered about. Your thoughts don't matter, your cares aren't important, your opinions aren't worthy of consideration, and it wouldn't make much of a difference to me if you weren't around."* (By the way, on a related side note, one of the coldest things a parent can say to a child is, *"I don't care what you do."*) On another related side note, when we repeatedly mispronounce someone's name, that can convey a bit of indifference toward that person, as if to say, *"You're not important enough for me to get your name right."* It can also be a way to subtly and intentionally insult someone. I've read that George H. W. Bush used to intentionally insult Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein by calling him SADdam; putting the accent on the first syllable. The accent is supposed to go on the second syllable ... sadDAM, which means *"learned one" or "respected leader."* Placing the accent on the first syllable, however, gives us a word meaning *"a boy who fixes or cleans old shoes,"* or, *"a shoe-shine boy" ...* which is a most derogatory insult in parts of the Arab world. Back to the subject at hand: Indifference is the real opposite of love, not hate. At least there's a sort of affirmation of significance in being hated; if for no other reason that there is a focus of attention in active hate, a recognition of someone's existence. Indifference, however, says, *"You are IN-significant; your existence doesn't matter to me at all."*

So, maybe John is saying, *"Be indifferent to the world."* That helps somewhat, but it still leaves a problem, though ... because it is biblically obvious that **God** is not indifferent toward this world; He cares very deeply about it. John himself says so in his Gospel account. Are we to be indifferent, cool, aloof, detached, apathetic toward something about which God cares so deeply? Of course not.

That leads to the second point: The Bible speaks of the world in basically three ways. **First**, the Bible speaks of the **physical** world, the Creation, referred to in our Call to Worship. In and of itself, Creation is good. This is the world spoken of in the first few pages of the Bible, which God Himself calls good. Just as an aside, do you remember the only thing in Creation that God said was *not* good? Genesis 2:18 ... *"It is not good for the man to be alone."* (another brief aside -- Some of you may know this story, bear with me: I had first proposed to Ann November 7, 1989, at the entryway to a medieval castle overlooking the Mosel River in Alken, Germany; however, she made me wait a few days for an answer. When she awoke the next morning, she turned the page on her day-by-day devotional calendar, which provided a single Bible verse every day. The verse for November 8, the new day? Genesis 2:18 .... *"It is not good for the man to be alone."* I felt like I had a divine Ally! She said *"Yes" the next night.*) We are not to hate that world that God calls good! We are not to be indifferent toward, apathetic toward, God's good Creation. Everything God created is good; used properly and under divine direction, the pleasures and goods of this world are ours to enjoy from the hand of a gracious, loving God. God wants us to live with joy, to enjoy His good creation! And to that end He has given us principles and laws and directions how to best do so. The world does belong to God and as His people we are not to be indifferent toward it ... if anything, we are to actively take care of this world to be attentive and involved stewards of this world and those who dwell therein. Again, the one thing in creation God noted was not good was that the man was alone. So God created Eve, which facilitated the creation of more people, which leads to the **second** way the Bible speaks of the world.

That is the world of humanity, the world whom God loves and for which Christ died. *"For God so loved the world ..."* We are not to be indifferent toward that world, either. We are to actively and attentively love that world, to

engage ourselves, interact with, the world of human beings about us. We are to love our neighbors, not withdraw from them in aloof isolation. We are even directed to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us. We seek to follow our Lord's example in actively loving those in the world for whom He died. We give of our time and finances in worship as we seek to minister to and serve the spiritual and physical needs of our congregation, our community **and** our world.

The third "world" about which the Bible speaks is the worldly **mindset** that refuses to see beyond the visible, seen world. This is John's focus in I John 2, it is Jesus' focus in John 14, it is Paul's focus in the last chapter of 2 Timothy -- the last paragraph that Paul ever wrote, as far as we know -- when he writes "*Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.*" This "world" is the worldly mindset that says "*This world is all there is.*" The spirit of *this* world is opposed to the Spirit of God; this is the spirit whose earthly and physical and materialistic values, goals, ambitions are often diametrically opposed to the eternal values, goals and ambitions of the Spirit of God. The spirit of this world says there IS no God; this physical world is all there is, what's here is it, so satisfying your cravings and appetites and lusts now is all that matters. The Spirit of this world is doing its best to convince us this is all there is, that **this** is the real world, and that just isn't true! We talk about the world outside of the church walls as being the "real world out there," but it is here in worship where we are actually closer to the **real** world, the eternal world, the world of God's everlasting Kingdom. This physical world we see and touch is so visible, so close, so enticing, and can lead us to believe that it is the real world ... but this world will pass away. God's kingdom is forever; the things of God last for eternity. "*Don't love this world,*" John says. "*Don't become too attached to the things and attitudes that are of this world only. Be indifferent toward them. Don't let the things of this world take you captive.*"

Some of you may be familiar with the term "Stockholm Syndrome." My late father-in-law was an FBI agent; I learned the FBI first coined the term after a 1973 attempted bank robbery in Stockholm, Sweden. The police had trapped the criminal inside the bank. The desperate robber took four people hostage, three women and one man, and held them for 131 hours. During this time he terrorized them, firing his Russian automatic assault weapon and threatening to kill them. He put nooses around their necks, covered their faces, and threatened to hang them. When he finally surrendered, you would expect that the hostages would be antagonistic toward their captor. Instead, the hostages said they feared the police *more* than their captor! After nearly six days of captivity and control by their captor, they inexplicably feared the police who were doing their best to rescue them. They didn't hate the captor. They all refused to testify against him in court; one of the women actually became engaged to him!

The FBI analyzed literally thousands of hostage situations since that time, and learned that this sort of thing happened frequently. With the high level of fear and life-threatening stress taking place, apparently people's psychological defense mechanisms come into play. Something of an irrational denial of what is actually happening occurs, and a sort of regression takes place. Captives come to believe that, "*This guy who is severely limiting my freedom and keeping me captive doesn't really want to hurt me, he wants to protect me. It's those folks out there coming after our beloved captor who are really our enemy.*" The hostage begins to transfer his/her fear and hatred of the captor to the potential rescuers! Something else often happens, in that a relationship of **dependence** actually begins to develop, similar to what happens between a young child and a mother. The "mother" is protecting the "child" from the terrifying world out there, and providing for all the "child's" needs. The Stockholm Syndrome: Instead of hating those who seek to harm them and keep them captive and locked down, the captives begin to hate those who are seeking to *rescue* them, those who are seeking to set them free. And they actually begin to *love their captors*.

Well, John is warning against the *spiritual* Stockholm Syndrome. The spirit of this world would take us captive, the spirit whose values are ultimately self-destructive, unproductive, imprisoning, life-restraining instead of life fulfilling, and those taken captive often begin to love the one who should be the enemy. They begin to resent and fear the God who is trying to rescue them, and they actually love, defend and support those attitudes, habits, lifestyles which hold them captive, enslaving and harming them. They also often become angry and resentful toward those who only seek to do them good, trying to set them free, trying to lovingly remind them of what is good and wholesome and right and eternal.

Imagine John saying, "*Friends, Love God first and foremost, lovingly care for and enjoy His good creation, love the people for whom He sent his Son, but have nothing to do with that worldly mind-set that is in rebellion against God and indifferent to His standards. Don't love the world; be indifferent toward that spirit.*" Don't allow your time, your energy, your finances, your selves, your families be taken captive by the Spirit of this world. Don't be taken hostage by it. Don't fall in love with your would-be captor. Love and serve the God who seeks to rescue all of us in this world from the shallow, empty, destructive captivity of the spirit of this world ... for this world and all that is in it is NOT all there is. His kingdom is forever.