January 16/17, 2010

Torn Between Two Lovers

1 John 2: 15-18

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There is no question that to live a decade on purpose, we will have to rightly steward our time and our money for God's purposes. Easier said than done. Martin Luther once said that he believes Christians go through three conversions: conversion of the mind, conversion of the heart, and conversion of the wallet. And I think he's right.

Over the years it's been very consistent that people really appreciate it when we talk about the hard subjects. People say, "Oh, Pastor Clark, we're really thankful you don't pull punches, and we really tackle the difficult subjects," until we talk about money. Then we've crossed the line. Then somehow we're meddling. The discussion is somehow different. Why is that?

I would suggestion to you it's because money is simply a symptom that's rooted to something very deep within us. As a matter of fact, I'll go so far as to say until we deal with this core issue, we stand no chance of living the next decade on purpose. Let's talk about that. If you have a bible, turn with me to 1 John 2. For those of you that have been here awhile, this is not new. You've heard this before. But it's one of those subjects that is good to talk about every now and then. 1 John 2:15:

> **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.** (*NASB, 1 John 2:15)

Do not love the world or the things in the world. Now what does John mean by the world? The New Testament uses the word *world* in a couple of different ways, but the majority of times is the way John is using it here. It's in reference to the world system, to the world's value system. We might refer to it as the world's operating system. John says, "Do not love the world nor the things of the world." We'll talk about the *things* in just a minute. Why not? Because if you love the world, then the love of the Father is not in you.

Jesus said something very similar. Jesus said you cannot love both God and money; you're going to have to make a choice. James says (James 4:4) that "Friendship with the world is adultery with God." Those are very strong words.

What these biblical writers are saying is that you simply cannot have two lovers. You cannot love both the value system of this world and God. They're competing systems. You cannot have two lovers.

Now I think we understand this. If I was to come home and to say to Patty, "Honey, I really love you and it's really been great being married to you. But I found another lover, and I'm wondering if it's okay to have two lovers." Once I regained consciousness, I would know that's a bad idea. She would never tolerate that.

If that's true of us, why would we think that it's acceptable to God. God is saying you can't have two lovers. You're going to have to make a choice. Maybe that's why we respond so differently when we talk about money is because we're exposing the mistress. And what I've found over the years is people don't like it when the mistress is exposed. Oftentimes there's an emotional period

of time where people are trying to decide which lover do I choose. The fact of the matter is that a lot of Christians live very frustrated Christian lives because they're torn between two lovers and they can't make up their minds which one they're going to love.

John says, "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." It still leaves us with the question, "But specifically what do you mean by the world's system?" Well, he defines that for us. Verse 16:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh…

The word lust means what we think. It's a strong desire or craving. Where we get confused is around the word *flesh.* Oftentimes when people hear the lust of the flesh they're thinking kind of evil, sexual immorality, drunkenness, things like that. But that isn't really primarily what the word *flesh* refers to and it's not what John is referring to here. The flesh biblically in both the Old and New Testament carries the idea of that which I can do myself, that which I can do within my own power. Religion flows out of the flesh. Legalism flows out of the flesh.

To really understand the world's operating system and the lust of the craving of the flesh, this desire to be my own god, you have to go all the way back to the early chapters of Genesis. In Genesis 1 and 2 we learn that we as people are made in the image of God and we find our significance, we find our value, we find our meaning, we find our purpose in being rightly related to God. Being rightly related to God, then we live our lives out of that relationship. But in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sin against God, and sin separates them; it cuts them off from a relationship with God which raises then an interesting question. Now that I'm cut off from God, where do I find my significance? Where do I find my value and my meaning and my purpose? And the answer is I must now find it in myself. I've chosen to be my own God. Therefore it's on the basis of my own performance that I find my significance. It's on the basis of my performance that I find my value and my worth and meaning and purpose in life. Therefore now, having become my own God, I live in a performance-based culture where I myself determine my own value and significance on the basis of what I do.

In order to measure that performance, then life becomes a competition and a comparison. The only way that my performance makes any sense is on the basis of how I perform compared to others. So everyone around me is a competitor. I'm comparing myself to see how I measure up. It can be anything from how I look to what I own to what my job title is. It can be anything that we use for comparison. There's a hundred different things, but at the end of day, what defines life is that my value, my significance, meaning and purpose flow out of my ability to perform and that's based on a comparison with everyone around me. So I'm not really free to love the people around me. They're my competitors. I'm competing with them. Life then becomes this relentless performance-based system and what comes with that is a relentless pressure. Every day I feel this pressure to perform. Every day I feel this pressure to measure up. The system by its very nature forces us to be selfish. Every moment of every day I'm figuring out how I compare with everyone else in how I look, in what I have, in what my job is. Whatever the comparison is, every day is a competition and a comparison; and because of that, every day is about me-me-me. The system forces us to be selfish to the core. So I'm living with this pressure every day to measure up, to compete, to compare; and so there's just this relentless pressure that never goes away. No matter how well I perform today, what about tomorrow, and what about the next day? One moment I feel good about myself because of whom I compared myself with. An hour later I feel terrible about myself because of who I compared myself with. It's up and down and up and down. And this performance anxiety

leads to all kinds fear, it leads to anxiety, it leads to all kinds of health problems, it leads to all kinds of emotional problems. Then it leads to all kinds of addictions and leads to all kinds of destructive behavior. It's just a system that is destroying people. It is the core operating system of the world.

I don't think it's just limited to adults. I think we're seeing it in our children and I think we're seeing it in our teenagers. You talk to a lot of teenagers and they're feeling the pressure. It's overwhelming and it never goes away, day after day after day.

One of the things that is becoming more and more common with these teenagers is a practice called cutting, and basically it's physically cutting yourself as a way to relieve this emotional pressure. The pressure is just too much and it brings some moment of relief. I'm convinced there are far too many teenagers that actually fail on purpose. The pressure is so overwhelming, it's easier just to fail and get it over with than to live with the pressure day after day after day.

Many adults are feeling the effects physically and emotionally of this pressure that never goes away. No matter how good you were today, what about tomorrow? It drives the pace of the culture.

Two years ago many people would have made the case that Tom Brady is the greatest quarterback in the history of football. The New England Patriots had an amazing run of an undefeated season, and the only game they lost that year was in the Super Bowl to the New York Giants. Last weekend, Tom Brady was booed off the field by the fans of the New England Patriots because that's the nature of the system. *What have you done for me lately? I don't care what you did yesterday. If you don't perform today, you have no significance. You have no value. You have no worth. Get off the field.* We know that's how the system works and it is relentless, and people feel that pressure.

Alice Gray tells a wonderful story of a Special Olympics when these special athletes had prepared and worked hard, and this is a very big deal to them. This group of athletes lined up at the starting lineup, and the gun went off and they began the 100-meter race. Partway through the race, one of the competitors fell to the ground, and it appeared as if he was struggling to get back on his feet. Much to the surprise of everyone, one of his fellow competitors stopped, went back, helped him to his feet, and the two of them finished the race together to thunderous applause. Everyone in the place that day knew that even though they didn't finish first, they had truly won the race. Everyone knew that's the right thing to do, yet we just don't live that way. There's something deep inside of us that says, "Yes, that's the right way to live, but I can't afford to stop and go back because this pressure pushes me day after day. I'm barely keeping up. I'm falling behind. I just can't slow down."

So how is this performance measured? How do we put points on the scoreboard? Well, John tells us that. He says:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes…

In both the Old and the New Testament the concept of the eyes, lust of the eyes, is a reference to covetness, in other words this idea of greed, this idea of "I see it and I want it". It connects directly with the lust of the flesh because it's the way we put points on the scoreboard.

In our culture, and I think cultures around the world, ultimately the game is scored with money and stuff. It has to do with what kind of a house we live in, what kind of cars we drive, what kind of money we have, what kind of stuff we have. That's how the culture defines success. So the way that I demonstrate I matter, I have significance, I have value is by the money and the stuff that we accumulate. In our culture we define success by what we're able to own and accumulate.

Over the last several weeks I've heard it said over and over and over again, people have said, "Tiger Woods had it all." That is an interesting definition of *all*. In our culture, *all* means he had lots of money. He had success as an athlete, and he had fame. And in the definition of our culture he *had it all.* I would suggest to you Tiger Woods has nothing. He is bankrupted in the stuff that matters. And if somebody doesn't help this poor guy, he's going to self-destruct. But in our culture, if you have money and you have stuff, then you have it all.

So when we buy our houses, when we buy our cars, when we swipe our credit cards, what's at stake there is my self-esteem. What's at stake there is my value, is my significance. This is why we tend to overspend and live beyond our means. This is why we're not free to be generous. This is why we react differently when we talk about money.

Statistics or studies show that the average American family simply spends more than they make. The average American family carries over five thousand dollars month to month on their credit card. Why is that? Is it a math problem? This isn't complicated. If I make twenty dollars, then I probably shouldn't spend twenty-one dollars. I think we get that; it's not a math problem. Is it a budget problem? No, I don't think so. I think at the core of the issue it's a self-esteem problem. What we're buying is an attempt to put points on the scoreboard, to say, "Hey, I'm significant! I matter! I measure up!" If you don't believe that, go back to a class reunion. It's clear that that's the way the game is played. "Hey, check me out! I matter!"

So every time that credit card is swiped, we're saying, "Hey, I matter! I'm significant!" We've lost the difference between needs and wants. Someone has said that the new definition of a need is something I've wanted for three days. Our spending is out of control because our self-esteem is connected to our money and our stuff. And when our self-esteem is sagging, "I've gotta swipe the card. I've gotta somehow demonstrate I am a player and that I matter in this world."

One of the problems is that most people don't consider themselves to be greedy, and the reason for that is because we tend to compare ourselves with people that live in the same socioeconomic class. So we look at other people in our same class and we say, "You know, I'm just like them. I'm no greedier than anybody else." It just seems normal. That's like a drunk sitting in an alley looking at another drunk saying, 'I don't have a problem; look at that guy." The comparison is not with other people who are living in bondage to this performance-based value system. The comparison must be with what God has called us to be about. The comparison must be how God has called us to manage and steward what He has given to us.

At the end of the day we will never be generous if we live a performance-based value system because we cannot afford to take points off the scoreboard. "We're barely keeping up. We're not competing well. "I just can't do that." So we're not free with our time. We're not free to be generous with our finances because we need to put more points on the scoreboard. Unless you break loose from a performance-based value system, you are doomed to live a decade of performance, and a decade of performance is to guarantee that you will waste the next ten years.

The fact of the matter is the system of the world, the performance-based value system cannot deliver the goods. It always leads to destruction. Look at what John says:

> **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.**

John is saying that this value system, this lust of the flesh, this lust of the eyes, this isn't from God. This isn't from the Father. This isn't the way God wants us to live. It leads to the boastful pride of life. In other words, the only way in that system that I can feel good about myself, the only way that I can really feel that I have significance, that I have value, is that I've compared myself with somebody else and I think I'm better. Therefore, that makes me feel good about myself but can only fill me with arrogance, and arrogance is always destructive. The other alternative is to compare myself and compare poorly. Therefore, I have this despair. Therefore, my self-esteem goes in the tanker, and it just makes the pressure all the greater. Either way, the ultimate end of that value system is destruction. It can never deliver the goods. That's why John says it ultimately passes away, which raises the question is there an alternative—and the answer is yes. But the one who does the will of God lives forever.

The will of God is basically what John is talking about in all five chapters of his letter. In essence, the core of the letter is letting us know that God, in His scandalous grace, made a way that we could be restored to a right relationship with Him. Because we could never perform well enough, God Himself became flesh and took our place on the cross. He there paid for our sins and offered us back salvation as a gift of His grace. We can't earn it. We can't deserve it. We can't perform for it. It is simply a gift of God's goodness. And in receiving that gift, our sins are forgiving, but more than that we are restored into a right relationship with God. Therefore we go back to Genesis 2 and find our significance, find our meaning and our value and our purpose in life by being rightly related to God, and it's out of that relationship that I live my life. At that point, the pressure is off. At that point, I feel this wonderful release to that anxiety and pressure day after day after day because my self-esteem, my significance, my value is rooted in the person and character of God and it's given to me as a gift of His grace. Therefore, it is not tied in any way to my daily performance. It's not that we don't perform any more. We do. The difference is I'm no longer performing to find my significance, to find my value, to find my meaning and purpose in life.

I would suggest to you that understanding a grace-based value system actually sets you free to perform at a higher level because now that I know that my significance and my value and my worth is rooted in the person and character of God on the basis of God's grace, I am set free everyday to take risks, to take chances, to do what God has called me to do because I know that my self-esteem, my value and significance, it's not at risk. It's safe and it's stable and it's secure in the person of God. I think that sets us free to perform at a higher level because we've been set free from the bondage of a performance-based value system.

At the end of the day, if you're going to remain rooted in a performance-based value system, you are doomed to live a decade of performance. And at the end of that decade in 2020, you will look back and you will know that you missed it. And the sobering reality is you do not get a do-over. You will not have the time and you will not be generous with your money if you are rooted in a performance-based value system. It is only when you understand the realities of grace and you find your significance and your value and your meaning and purpose and being rightly related to God that you're free to love the people around you. They are no longer your competitors. They no longer put your own self-esteem at risk, so you're free to love them and cheer-lead them and to be

for them. You're free to be generous with your money because it's no longer about putting points on the scoreboard because your self-esteem is now found in the person of God. You've been absolutely set free to live a decade on purpose.

So what are we asking from you? What are we asking from you financially? We're asking you to prayerfully consider engaging financially in the vision that God has laid on our hearts, and we'll tell you more about that next week, but in order that you might think about it and pray about it. The average family at Lincoln Berean, or the average person—some can give more, some will give less—but for the average person, this is what we're asking: Would you prayerfully consider on a daily basis giving up the cost of a gallon of gas or a gourmet cup of coffee or a box of popcorn? If three thousand of us are willing to do that in the next three years we can completely eliminate our debt, which frees us up to move full speed ahead into this vision that God has laid on our heart.

On a daily basis for just the cost of a gallon of gas, box of popcorn, or a gourmet cup of coffee, we can change the world.

In January 2004, I delivered this same message out of this same text and made the same appeal, only at that time we were headed into six weekend services and part of the appeal was would you be willing to sacrifice in order to make room so that those who were seeking God will have a seat to sit in? Many, many, many of you responded and sacrificed.

My question this morning to is was it worth it?

You're going to hear the story of Tom and Pam. Tom and Pam's story simply represents hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of stories whose lives have been changed by the power of Jesus because there was room to come and to hear the message. Listen to the story of Tom and Pam. I'll let you answer the question for yourself was it worth it.

> Pam: Tom and I have been married for nine years now, but both of us had been married before, and I was really looking for a partner, someone to share life with, someone to do things with, someone that was just a companion in every sense of the word. And it was so much the opposite of that. It was just a very, very lonely life.
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> Tom: I knew I had a problem, but there was no way I was going to admit that. I would shake during the day, get the sweats, cold sweats, feverish, hot flashes. And when the day was over, the workday, I would drink on the way home and immediately feel better, and then get home and drink when I could get away with it.
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> Pam: Well, some of the worst things I remember is just not being able to count on him for things. There were just a long list of holidays and birthdays and family gatherings and all of those things where either we didn't go or he was out of it and didn't really contribute to the celebration that we were attending. I just wanted to be able to live a normal life like everybody else did and have a husband that you could depend on and not have the problems that we were having in our marriage.
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> Tom: My brother was going to the Berean Church and I really respect my brother. So we decided why don't we just check out the Berean Church. We were just, you know, at a point in our lives where we thought we needed something. I had grown up disenchanted

with the whole church-going process because I always felt that I wasn't even welcome unless I changed, unless I acted the way I was supposed to act.

Pam: There were times where I would go to church by myself and it was generally after we'd had an argument the night before because of the drinking usually. But I also started going to Titus Women's groups and found really a lot of support.

Tom: We had been going to Berean off and on—more off than on—especially me, and I had a real bad week and I was just consumed with my alcohol. And it was so bad that I couldn't even sleep. And I had called into work sick a couple of days, and the third day I was just shaking violently, and I knew that I couldn't get through that day. I had to talk to somebody. I went in and started talking to Bryan, and he just said, "You know, Tom, how do you expect, you know people that you care for to clean up their own lives if you can't do that yourself?" And I was, you know, taken, but I still wasn't in the right frame of mind to really admit that I have a problem.

After I had the meeting with Bryan I got plugged into a Bible study. At that point I think I was trying to put up some sort of a façade that my life was getting better. The only problem was that I just kept drinking. It just went on until finally I knew that the end was near with our marriage, probably a matter of days.

Pam: And that was the point where I told him, you know, "Go to treatment. If you don't go to treatment, you know, you're not coming home." And I just got to the point where I just couldn't do anymore, and I just had to turn it over to God's hands because I knew it wasn't going to go any other way.

Tom: And I left, and I was gone. That was on a Saturday. I was gone that night. I talked to her a couple times the next day. I was at the park drinking. I realize that I was sitting there drinking, trying to figure out why I was drinking. I decided I've got to do this, and that's the way it was. I went into treatment. It gave me time to think. And the one thing I'd never really done for myself was think about God. I had time to pray. I had time to read. What Jesus did for me on the cross really started to sink in, and I was overwhelmed the way that He had suffered immeasurably for me. And Jesus just said, "Let me take this burden." Through my recovery I've spent a lot of time with people in Celebrate Recovery, and they help me when I'm with them. They help others who want the same kind of help, and through Christ we can do that.

Pam: The only thing I can attribute Tom's sobriety to is God working through us. I can't imagine what my life would be like if I wasn't connected with Berean right now. I know for certain that I would probably not be married. Berean is the first church I have ever gone to that welcomes everybody with all the problems that we come with. My husband today is a completely new man. And we're still learning, we still have bumps. There's still things that aren't quite right. There's still past hurts that aren't healed, but it's 100% better than it was.

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