



## **Translating a Four Letter Word**

### ***What Makes You Happy?***

When I used to go to Russia to teach, I each time went to a museum that contained millions of dollars of items owned by the old Russian czars. There were bejeweled Easter eggs. Carriages inlaid with gold. Lovely gowns worn by women of the royal families. Crowns with diamonds and gold and rubies and sapphires. The best craftsman of Russia and Europe bedecked the royal family with the most expensive clothes and jewelry available in the world. I was dazzled by the exquisite beauty of the ornate items the royal family owned. It was in its day meant to impress and it did. Yet, as I gazed upon all the finery owned by the czars, it could not help but wonder if perhaps they went too far. Millions of the people of Russia were starving and living in squalor and the servant class far outnumbered those who had freedom. The almost universal response to great wealth is that it never seems to be enough. You can never have too many shoes, servants or gold. The world went into shock when the Czar Alexander and his family were murdered by the Communists in the Russian revolution. But should there have been such astonishment at the hatred so many Russians had for the ruling aristocracy of Russia? I wonder if the Czar and his family would have lived to a ripe old age if they had followed the command of God found in our passage today. Perhaps Russia would be a completely different country now if they and their forefathers had practiced true Christianity.

The Apostle John makes this strong command in his letter. **Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one’s possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.** (1 John 2: 15-17 CSB) The verb translated “love” is an interesting choice of terms for John to use. This is a demand of God’s. **“Do not love the world or the things in the world.”** A more precise way of putting it for better understanding is, “Never love the world or the things in the world!” The Greek word chosen which is translated “love” is an odd one. Until Christian writing began to proliferate in the first and second centuries, it was hardly ever used by the Greeks. Other Greek words translated love were much more commonly used and understood such as “storge” which is the love shared between family members or those brought together by some common interest or challenge. Phileo is friend love, the relationship people who enjoy being together possess for each other. Eros is sexual or romantic love. All three of these concepts of love were discussed and expressed in Greek literature. However, the fourth category of love, agape, was hardly used until Christians brought it into common Greek culture. Agape describes an unconditional love, a love that is unflagging regardless of how circumstances go. Authors of the New Testament and the early church saw this love as the love that comes from God and through the Holy Spirit believers can share with others. It is the love you would have for your enemies, the love you find for those who hurt you and treat you badly as well as anyone else the Lord puts into your life.

What is fascinating about this command is it that those who put their hope in Christ for salvation are never to have agape love for the world. Let’s consider the second part of this command.. The word translated world is the Greek term cosmos, and it has a variety of meanings based on context. Cosmos can describe the entire universe; it can speak of the earth itself and it often simply is the people of earth or those in a part of the world. The Bible however most frequently uses the word cosmos to speak of all those opposed to the Kingdom of God, either because they have rejected Christ as Savior, or they simply do not follow Him as Lord. Carefully consider Jesus’ declaration as He went over some final thoughts with the Disciples just before He was taken away to be crucified. **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If**

**you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” (John 15: 18-19 NIV)**

Do you notice the connection here? If you are following Jesus and living with Him as Lord, the world will hate you. Again, hate is a Hebrew way of saying you will not be loved; you may be despised, ignored, rejected, avoided, or even persecuted, but you will not be loved for your walk with Christ. Why does the world hate you? Because, in this case as is how it is used in our key passage, the world is all those who have rejected Christ and do not live with Him as Lord of their lives. The world is the entire order of people that is disconnected from God and operates outside Him. That’s how “lust of the flesh”, “lust of the eyes” and “pride in one’s possessions” fit into the command. Those are the priorities of the world. Doing what you want and gathering as much as you can for yourself or those you love is the way of the world. It doesn’t mean those in the world are always selfish or self-centered, they just are disconnected from Jesus and the Kingdom of God. The Scriptures do not determine their way of life and they do not think with Christ leading the way. It is the world Christ came to save from hell and so why would any Christians who have been born again want to return to what was death for them?

Nehemiah, the ancient governor of Israel after the Jews began to return from captivity, provides an example for us. The Israelites were just really getting restarted in their new life as the people of God. They were building homes, re-establishing worship of God in the city of Jerusalem, beginning to practice the festivals celebrating their relationship with YHWH and developing homes where God was at the center of their lives. They still had old bad habits that kept them from being completely loyal to God and his word. They were not a totally isolated people; they traded with the nations around them and many foreign, pagan vendors from the region would come to Jerusalem to sell their goods. It was mutually beneficial except for one major issue. The vendors camped outside the city wall Friday night and set up their stalls to sell their goods in Jerusalem on Saturdays, the Sabbath. Friday night and Saturday was the Lord’s day and in the Law commanded to be honored as a time for no work and dedication to God as an act of worship. The foreign vendors had no loyalty to God and did not concern themselves with following the Sabbath. The cosmos was taking over the city of God’s people. It was comfortable to the Jews buying and selling goods on the Sabbath because the mindset of the world, the disregard for God and what He says had crept into their thinking. The loyalty of God’s people was wavering and the values of the world they were taking back. Nehemiah solved this by ordering the gates of the city to be locked starting at sunset on Friday evening and not reopening them until sunset Saturday evening. He forced the vendors to stay outside Jerusalem until after God’s day of no work, the Sabbath was over.

We don’t have time to discuss the values of the Sabbath and how it applies to the Christian life, but we will close by commenting on what Nehemiah teaches us about our approach to the world. The command of God to not love the world nor the things of the world may seem rigid and legalistic but then so is the direction to not eat wild mushrooms or run stoplights. Of course it may seem like a great idea to drive home drunk because it is convenient and maybe you should be legalistic about staying away from certain neighborhoods at night. We embrace legalism until it conflicts with our desires and interests. The lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride in one’s possessions is simply another way of talking about all those things that keep you from walking with God or being led by Him. Jesus made this statement, and each person must decide what to do about it. Talking to a woman at a well who didn’t realize what having Christ as Savior would bring her, **Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**(John 4: 13-14 NIV) If you believe the best life is the one coming directly from Jesus and whatever you do, see or hear not aligned with how Jesus says to live damages the effect of having Christ as your Savior, then perhaps there are some things you should not do, you should avoid and you should reject outright. Like Nehemiah, there are times when you need to lock the gates to your own Jerusalem and keep out certain movies, songs, internet sites and relationships because they wreck your life with God, take away your joy and ruin the peace He offers you. “Do not love the world!”