

The Summer of Love
Week 4: Don't be seduced.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

Last week was heavy. Let us know in the church that just because we say, Lord, Lord, and list the Christian things we have done doesn't mean that we know him or love him. To know him and to love him is to follow him.

John follows this hard message to an embattled church with some encouragement.

Throughout this letter John is writing to **two different groups** within these churches that he has planted in what, today, would be western turkey. There are those who are promoting a philosophy of that time called **Gnosticism**. The Greek word, **gnosis, is the word for knowledge**. These people believe that they are **spiritual elite** because they have special knowledge from God. They also believe that this spiritual knowledge is **separate from the dirty, lowly, physical world that we live in. The spiritual is higher and cannot relate to the physical world.** That means that how they live and how they use their bodies has nothing to do with their spiritual experience with God. That means their **sin is irrelevant**. It doesn't matter how I live or how I behave because **that cannot affect my spiritual connection with God**. That also means that **Jesus could not have been God, spirit and human, physical.**

The second group are those within the church who **are in danger of being led astray** by these spiritually superior people. **They have heard the gospel from the mouth of John**, one of Jesus' closest followers, a man in his inner circle. **They have read John's Gospel** which was distributed to these churches before the 1st, 2nd and 3rd John were written. **For these people, there is hope.**

Often when John is talking directly to the **first group, he is very direct, blunt, and somewhat confrontational**. He is confronting untruth. These people are **spreading a virus** within the church that is deadly. As John put it earlier, these people are **not in the light, they are in darkness of which they have chosen**. After all, **they also heard the true, pure gospel teaching from John**, and have read his account of Jesus' life in his gospel.

When referring to this second group, John is still direct, but much more gentle, more pastoral. He even refers to them as beloved children. And that's how we know that, in these next few verses, he is talking directly to them.

As I am reading, notice and even mark in your journals, the terms little children, fathers, and young men. This next section is written almost like poetry. Today's section is 1 John 2:12-17. We will read 12-14 first.

¹² I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

¹³ I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.

¹⁴ I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one. 1 John 2:12-14

John begins with "little children," which means he is, in fact, talking to those in the church who are not preaching this false philosophy, but rather those who might be seduced by it.

Did you notice the pattern? It has little children, fathers, young men, and then back to children, fathers, and young men. I believe that fathers and young men are referring to not simply males, but those in the church who are older and hopefully wiser, and those ones who are young and full of energy.

John is here encouraging both old and young to overcome and remain strongly in the gospel that John taught them. He establishes some facts, some realities. Their sins have been forgiven, they know God, they have overcome evil, they are strong, and the word of God is in them. Don't be confused by what you are hearing, these facts are your foundation. They are to avoid being seduced by

these Gnostics with their philosophy and spiritual elitism. **This is staying in the light and avoiding the darkness, stepping into Jesus' light.**

This brings us to the next part of our passage. **Let's pick back up with verse 15.** Remember the **key words we are looking for?** Get ready to mark them. ¹⁵ **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.** ¹⁶ **For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.** ¹⁷ **And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15-17 ESV**

What was one of our **key words** in that section? **"Love"** is a big part of John's message. If you are using our **study guide**, we are encouraging you to mark it with the **same color or symbol** throughout this study. **On the journal side, make a list of what John is trying to teach about love.**

There are two other very important words that are easily misunderstood. The first one is **"flesh."** Our bodies are God's creation, and they are good. When God created the earth and all that is in it, he said that it was **good, but when he created people, he said it was very good.** The Greek word translated flesh is **"sarx."** John is using this word to describe **those desires born out of separation from God** that want what God does not want for us.

This is a completely different message from these Gnostics who say that the physical world is of **no consequence, and it is low and menial.** And they would have **no issue with any desires of their flesh,** because those desires and acting upon them has nothing to do with their spiritual connection with God. **Obviously, John begs to differ.**

The next, often misunderstood, word is "world." Much like "flesh" it is used as a **negative or bad thing.** Therefore, to understand this word to mean the whole of creation would be to misunderstand John. **We have already said that creation was and is good.** The world that John is saying watch out for and **is fading away,** is those **patterns, systems, that fast track what our flesh wants.** The world **creates pathways** for those things the flesh craves.

We are to love the world so that we can go into it. We are to love our enemies and all who are separated from God. What we are to hate are those

systems...that encourage our flesh into sin and the consequences of that sin. We hate the world because when we listen to it our relationship with God is negatively affected.

You can probably come up with all kinds of ways to illustrate how both the flesh and the world, properly interpreted, could go together hand in glove. An obvious one is sexual lust. My flesh is that there is the desire to satisfy myself outside of what God says it was designed for. It's selfish, only wanting to satisfy itself. The world, our culture, the systems in place, can fast track my desires outside of God through images from websites, movies/TV, print etc. And, a culture that has said that there are no boundaries, just you get yours.

Here's some more of what John says later in chapter 5 about the world. ⁹ **We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 1 John 5:19**

Those systems, patterns, beliefs that are there to give me opportunities to satisfy my flesh are under the control of Satan. These are here to break down, and destroy what God made for good.

The opposite of the flesh and the world is the Kingdom of God. The kingdom of God that Jesus came to announce is the restoration of God's rule over all things and when this is happening on earth, as it is in heaven, then things start working right, as designed.

In his gospel, John writes this to finish the storyline of the world. ³¹ **Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. John 12:31**

These patterns or systems that make up the world are the domain of Satan, who will be overthrown. When God's rule over all things is completely restored, the judgment pronounced here will be carried out and those systems and patterns and philosophies will be destroyed, and their author cast out into darkness.

What John is describing and warning them against is being seduced by the world and, clearly, he puts our gnostic friends in that category.

Seduced is to entice to evil; to lead astray; specifically, to induce to surrender chastity; to debauch by means of solicitation.

In the Bible it is typically, "to be simple" "to lead astray". In other words, it takes **two to tango**. One must be simple, unwise, naïve, and the other then leads this one astray into sin and the consequences of sin.

Here's how John describes what that means. He wants these Christians to not be naïve or simple, but be aware. They are **Being seduced by...**

1. cravings and desires... That is any desire that is carried out in a way that is contrary to God's righteousness. **This brings us back to the flesh.** It's an itch that needs to be scratched and a hunger that needs satisfying outside of God's love.

Let's look back at verse 16. ¹⁶ "For all that is in the world—the desires of the **flesh** and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world." There you have it desires of the flesh. **Greed, pride, hate, lust, a desire to be one's own king, to be self-sufficient not dependent upon God.**

That brings us to the **second part of being seduced** by the world. **2. Seeing opportunity and encouragement.**

Let's say **I have this desire that is wrong**, which does not align with God's righteousness and Jesus' example. **Then the world lets me see how this can happen.** This is that **lust of the eyes.**

Then, as I see it, I not only have opportunity, but I'm encouraged to leap right into it, because getting what you desire brings happiness. And by the way, **God is holding this good thing out of your reach.** He doesn't want you to be happy or fulfilled.

This pattern of seduction has been from the beginning. ⁶ **When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Genesis 3:6 NIV**

We want it, we see it on a silver platter right in front of us, promising us happiness and once we take it over and over it does seem to work. But that's

before the piper needs to be paid. This is where “the pride of Life” comes in. We become...**Overconfident**.

We cut some corners, we went for it, and it initially worked out. My greed and lust are working because I’m making great money and **buying all the stuff** that is supposed to make me happy. Then it’s “look at me. I’m on top, baby.”

This is typically when scratching that itch begins to **over promise and under deliver**.

“Thus, John has in mind an attitude of pretentious arrogance or subtle elitism that comes from one’s view of wealth, rank, or stature in society. It is an overconfidence that makes us lose any notion that we are dependent on God.” Pg. 116

John is trying to help them and us see that this **Seduction does not produce Love, unity, or fellowship**. Because it is based on selfishness.

If we stop here, it’s like saying, “Ok go out into this world of seduction and try to just, you know, be careful.” That’s a vague warning that doesn’t really help. Thankfully, there is **Protection from Seduction** in John’s writing and throughout the Bible.

Put it to the test...Look **once more at verse 16** because it gives us the way to put these desires to the test. “For all that is in the world—the desires of the **flesh** and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is **not from the Father, but is from the world.**”

Can I see that it doesn’t come from the father? Is it directly forbidden in the Bible? That’s an easy one, or should be, when I can look at something **objective**, like **God’s word**. But for those who have the **holy spirit residing** in them, they can also sniff it and see **if it smells like** it’s from God.

Can you see that it doesn’t reflect the **Kingdom of Jesus**?

This brings us back to **God’s word, the Bible**. Are you noticing a theme? It’s not that you must be an expert in the Bible, but **being in it regularly will make you a difficult person to seduce**, because you will see how a **Biblical worldview**,

a Kingdom worldview, is very different from "the world." We can see lies that we are being told. We will see that there is nothing about indulging my "flesh" that will bring the happy return that is promised.

Protection from seduction begins with putting it to the test. Then it comes down to...Confidence in Jesus, my Adoption and my commission

Confidence in Jesus...He is the savior, God with us and my example.

Confidence in my adoption...He chose me and I am his, that is my identity.

Confidence in my commission...He is sending me to make his kingdom present for others to love them and to make disciples.

John begins this section with encouraging those who could be seduced, but haven't yet said that they belong to Jesus. Their identity is in him since they believed the true gospel and their sins are forgiven.

In sports, confidence is a powerful thing. If I am coaching a player who starts putting into action what we are working on in practice into a match, that's where confidence can build. That player sees the payoff of playing the game the right way. Now this confidence allows him to play with more freedom.

When I was a player, I wanted to communicate to a player who wasn't as good as me very early in the match that he was going to lose. This was inevitable. Because a player with hope and confidence is a dangerous player. I want him thinking about where they are stopping for dinner on the way home.

But when we keep messing up, this is where the seduction can happen. You count these as losses and confidence dips and hope evaporates. You can throw up your hands and forget that you are, according to God's sight, pure because of Jesus. This is not arrogance, this is confidence that you are that adopted child. He wants to take you where you are and transform you if you will not resist him. This cannot happen if you aren't confidently trusting in what God has done and that he will finish what he started in you.

Arrogance is bad, but just as bad is a low self-esteem that doesn't believe that God really would adopt you and really can change you.

This phrase aligns my thinking to confidence in Jesus's choice of me. " I am one in whom Christ dwells and I live in his unshakable kingdom." This is who I am and where I reside.

John also lists people as protection. He purposely describes two groups of people in the body of Christ that, if properly functioning in unity and fellowship, will protect others against being seduced.

First there are the old, **Those with wisdom.**

Wisdom comes from persistent obedience over time. We need our older people to be engaged in the body of Christ, not simply our own families. What did Marge do? She invested in generations of kids through teaching Sunday school. So many people say, I'll really be a part after my kids are on their way in life because they are too busy. Then, because they are busy, they never develop those relationships in the body of Christ so when they retire and they have time and some wisdom, they don't share it in the fellowship.

For our older people we have a tradition of people investing in the next generation. We couldn't run without our retirees. This whole thing would come to a screeching halt. And Cultivate would as well.

We need your persistence despite getting here being more difficult. We need your perspective because you've seen more. We need your settled, less anxious attitude.

The second group has what the first may not have as much of anymore. These are younger people, **Those with energy and passion.**

Some who are older can be tempted to fulfill this verse. "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! Revelations 2:4 We need people like Zack, Dietrich...

This world will try to convince you to be too busy and too connected to technology. The world wants you to start saying, "Well, I'll get engaged in the body of Christ when I finish my schooling and get a job. We need you now. It

protects us from being seduced by our culture if we have your **energy and passion when we start wanting to settle.**

This is your culture, not mine; we need you. Those of us who are older can't do what you do.

But to have the advantage of these people helping you not to be seduced, you must make the effort to remain in fellowship with them. That is the danger of having too many things that are **age specific.** We should have **two services with different styles of worship,** so everybody gets what they want. **Then we miss the protection** against seduction that only happens when the church has those two types of people in relationship with one another, working together for the kingdom.

Stepping into the Light...This is our challenge to do something about what John is teaching us.

Pursue unity and fellowship.

Is there one thing that keeps nagging you that you need to do to keep unity in this fellowship? Is there in you the **attitude that you just need the content of Sunday morning** and don't need the fellowship?

Are there signs that you are being seduced?

The only time you have contact with God's word is when you hear it read on Sundays. That's a sure sign that **you are vulnerable.** You **don't really know anyone in this fellowship and no one knows you.** That probably means you are here as a **consumer.** **Do you have the attitude that God is holding out good stuff from you that your flesh wants?**

Your protection is available if you will take it...test what you have a desire for, have confidence in your identity in Christ and take advantage of the old and the young in the body of Christ.