

*Stop Loving
the World*



SERIES EDITORS

Joel R. Beeke & Jay T. Collier

Interest in the Puritans continues to grow, but many people find the reading of these giants of the faith a bit unnerving. This series seeks to overcome that barrier by presenting Puritan books that are convenient in size and unintimidating in length. Each book is carefully edited with modern readers in mind, smoothing out difficult language of a bygone era while retaining the meaning of the original authors. Books for the series are thoughtfully selected to provide some of the best counsel on important subjects that people continue to wrestle with today.

Stop Loving the World

William Greenhill

Edited by
Jay T. Collier



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Stop Loving the World

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Table of Contents

Preface.....	vii
1. Concerning the World and Our Love for It.....	1
2. Reasons for Not Loving the World.....	15
3. Our Relationship to God's Creation.....	29
4. Applications of the Doctrine.....	42
5. Further Motives for Not Loving the World.....	53
6. Directions for Getting Our Hearts Off the World.....	65

Preface

I imagine a title like *Stop Loving the World* evokes a strong response. While some people are willing to admit it more than others, most of us feel some tinge of resistance to being told not to love the world. Maybe your reaction is defensive. (*Who said I love the world? How dare you judge me like that?*) But more likely, the resistance comes in the form of a challenge. (*What do you mean that we should stop loving the world? John 3:16 says that God loves the world, so why not us too? Come on, why all the Puritan prudishness?*) The truth of the matter is that the mandate to stop loving the world is straight from the Bible: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15). So whether we react defensively or offensively, we must begin by wrestling with the fact that it is God who tells us to stop loving the world.

Could it be that the reason for such reactions is that we do love the world too much? It is true that some people present an imbalanced view that sees little to no value in the world around them. And surely we must seek a responsible understanding of what the biblical injunction to stop loving the world really means. But

in spite of such abuses and taking proper interpretation into account, sensitive Christians will readily admit that one of our greatest temptations is to make more of the world than we do of its Creator. Without realizing it, we cling to the things of this world with ardent affection. Even good, wholesome, God-given gifts are cherished more than the Giver.

Wealth, fame, and power are among the most desirable things that this world offers. We adore stuff, be it money, land, or other material conveniences and comforts. We cherish the good opinion of others, desiring honor among men. And we love to be in control, influencing the way things happen in this world and having our will be done. Each of these things has its proper place, yet we so easily expect them to be our source of joy.

The problem of loving the world is intensified in our day by the glamour of technological advances and the accessibility of so many things. The Internet virtually puts the world at our fingertips. You can sell or acquire just about anything at the click of a button, generate a multitude of “friends” and “fans” on blogs and social networking sites, and mobilize the masses with online campaigns. In this novel realm of virtual reality, the charms of the world appear ever at hand.

While our highly technological society, steeped in rampant materialism, is certainly prone to loving the world, the problem with worldliness and our resistance to being told to oppose it is nothing new. Love for the world

has been a problem for mankind since the Fall, when Adam and Eve cherished a piece of fruit more than the will of the One who created the fruit. It is an age-old problem that will persist until Christ returns, which is why the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle John to tell us to stop loving the world. Since this is a problem that the people of God have always had to battle against, we should avail ourselves of the counsel of Christians throughout the ages in our pursuit of a remedy for loving the world.

A good place to start is with the Puritans. Their sermons and books were often concerned with this topic, providing excellent resources for suppressing undue love for the world. To this end, I commend this book by William Greenhill (1598–1671). It was originally titled “Being against the Love of the World” and published as an appended sermon to his book, *The Sound Hearted Christian* (London, 1670). The text of this sermon is rather lengthy — much longer than the other appended sermons — and was likely preached in more than one service or expanded from the original delivery for publication purposes. Believing that the sermon stands well enough on its own as a book, we have updated the language for modern readers, divided it into convenient chapters, and added subheadings in order to help this piece of wise counsel speak to a new generation. It states rather concisely the Puritan concern and solution to the ever-common problem of loving the world.

Before you read this book, it might help you to realize that Greenhill felt the lure of the world and the pain associated with denying it his love. Long before he preached on the topic, he was challenged to put his principles into practice. Multiple times in his life, Greenhill was removed from respectable and influential places of employment due to his convictions. One of these times was in 1636. Greenhill had become a minister in Oakley, Suffolk, and he also participated in two prominent preaching posts in Suffolk and Norwich. These places of honor provided him a comfortable living and an opportunity to make a difference for Christ. But in 1633, King Charles I, who sorely opposed the Puritans, reissued *The Book of Sports* and declared that ministers who refused to read it from their pulpits would lose their positions. Like many Puritans, Greenhill refused to read it to his people and was removed from office.

What the Puritans found so offensive was that the book encouraged worldly entertainment on the Lord's Day. In effect this was a dual trial for Greenhill and others on how much they loved the world. First, following *The Book of Sports* would mean relinquishing part of the Lord's Day — a whole day set aside for a more direct and explicit expression of our love for the Lord — in order to display one's love for the world. Second, ministers were tempted to read this royal declaration under the threat of losing their employment. It was not that Greenhill believed that recreation and places of honor

were illegitimate. Rather, he was convinced that giving way to these temptations would betray a greater love for the things of this world than love for the God that gave them to him.

Greenhill's loss occurred long before he published this sermon, and he never refers to these personal struggles in the course of his message. Nevertheless, it serves to illustrate that Greenhill experienced the same sort of struggles he encouraged others to stand against. When tested, he was willing to give up good, godly positions in order to maintain a greater love for God. Greenhill stood in the trenches with his fellow brothers and sisters, giving counsel that had obviously been tested and tried in his own life.

One other thing should be noted about the Puritan call to stop loving the world. The Puritans have been portrayed as prudish stuffed shirts who wanted to withdraw altogether from the world. To cut through the caricature, we should note that Greenhill presents a balanced understanding of what it means to love the world. In the midst of this soul-searching message on loving the world, he is careful not to burden us with unreasonable expectations. Don't get me wrong; this is a very convicting book. But Greenhill avoids the mentality that denies the goodness of creation by distinguishing between properly *using* the world and *loving* it. He calls us to work with the things we have been given as an expression of our love for the Giver. Recognizing this, we see

that the call to stop loving the world is not ultimately about what we should not do; it is a means to the positive goal of delighting in God. Our problem, however, is that we are entangled in a love affair with the things God has created. The world promises to satisfy us with itself, and we run to it instead of God. The world sells us a bill of goods that it can never fulfill, and we accept it.

Perhaps the reason people react so strongly against the Puritans is because we do in fact love the world. If you are anything like me, you need to hear the challenging, yet encouraging, message of this book. In it, Greenhill provides us with a healthy antidote to our love affair with the world. He explains what it means to love the world, exposes the dangers of cherishing it, shares how we ought to relate to it, and gives encouraging directions for removing our hearts from it. It is a book with a timeless message, demonstrating the relevance of the Puritans for today. I pray it spurs you on to live in such a way that shows that the world and all its charms are not what you live for. Rather, may you live in the world and use it in such a way that people clearly see that your heart belongs to the Christ and Creator of this world.

Jay T. Collier
Grand Rapids, Michigan
November 2010

CHAPTER 1

*Concerning the World
and Our Love for It*

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in
the world.*

— 1 John 2:15

John was the beloved disciple of Christ, and he wrote this epistle to those who were dear to Christ. His great aim was to confirm them in the faith of Christ and to encourage them in holiness and love, as may appear in 1 John 3:23: “This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” In the second chapter, verses 1–2, he lays down a remedy against the infirmities of weak Christians, that if any sinned, they had an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. And lest that should be abused and men take liberty to sin (seeing there was such a remedy), he confronts them with keeping the commandments of the Lord in verses 3–6. This was a reminder that if they have any benefit by Christ, they will love Christ, and if

they love Christ, they will keep the commands of Christ and walk as Christ walked. In verses 7–11, he instructs them in love, showing that it is both a new and an old commandment, in diverse respects. And then he speaks particularly to “little children” in verse 12, to “young men” in verse 13, and to “fathers” in verse 14. He tells them in the text that they must not love the world and the things that are in it. To do so is a great impediment both to holiness of life and love one to another. The words of this text will afford us two observations.

First, even saints are prone to love the world. There would not be a prohibition against loving the world unless we were naturally inclined to it. Yes, Christians are too apt to love the world and the things of the world. There is a great suitableness between the world and our corrupt hearts and natures. Pleasures, profits, honors, and things of this nature suit our fancies, our affections, our dispositions, and our inclinations. Therefore the apostle says, “Love not the world.”

The second observation is that those who are in a state of grace — whether they are little children, young men, or fathers — should not love the world. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.”

Having made these observations, I will endeavor to address these things:

- What is meant by “the world,” and what it is to love it

- Some reasons why we should not love the world (chapter 2)
- Some questions about how we relate to God's creation (chapter 3)
- Some applications of the doctrine (chapter 4)
- Further motives for not loving the world (chapter 5)
- Directions for getting our hearts off the world (chapter 6)

What “the World” Means

There are three main ways to understand the word “world”:

1. “World” refers to the visible heavens and earth, with all the creatures in them, as they came from the hand of God. Genesis 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” And after that, we are told of particular things that were created. In the New Testament, we are told that “all things were made by him,” and that “he was in the world, and the world was made by him” (John 1:3, 10). The world, and all things in it, were made by Christ. God employed Christ in making the world and the things of the world. As a result, all things on earth are the workmanship of God and Christ, and are understood by the word “world.”

2. “World” means the customs, manners, worship, and fashions of the world. Romans 12:2 says: “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed.” That is, do not be conformed to the customs and manners of the world, to its worship and fashions. We also see this in Colossians 2:20–22: “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances...after the commandments and doctrines of men?” Here, “world” is to be understood as the rudiments of men, the ways of men, the worship of men, and the ways of men in the worship of God. So you can see that “world” implies the customs, fashions, manners, and worship of the world. Elsewhere, these are called “weak and beggarly elements” (Gal. 4:9) and “the tradition of men” (Col. 2:8).

3. “World” means the pomp and splendor of the world, which Satan makes use of to further his kingdom and interest as well as to hinder the kingdom and interest of Christ. It is the abuse of the glory and greatness of God’s creation, the excellencies and gifts of men, and the profits and pleasures of the world. So in Galatians 6:14 Paul says, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” That is, “I am crucified to the pomp, glory, and splendor of the world, and all that is good according to the world. And the world is crucified unto me. It is a dead thing to me, and I am a dead thing to it.” Paul elsewhere tells how Demas

“loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10), abandoning the ministry for the things, the pleasures, the profits, the honors, the comforts, and the contents of the world.

So then, “love not the world.” Do not love the creatures of the world, the customs and fashions of the world, or the splendor, pomp, glory, and worship of the world. These three meanings of “world” are all understood here in our text.

What It Is to Love the World

1. To love the world is to highly esteem it, holding it in a high account. Christ said that the things that are of high account with men are an abomination to God. When we hold the world and the things of it in high esteem, we love the world. Those in Luke 14, when they were invited to the great feast, held their farms, their oxen, their wives, and the things of the world in higher account than the things of Christ. When these things are highly esteemed, we are said to love the world.

Many men would think that they had it made if they had the world. They say, “I would be happy if I had such an estate, such honors, such greatness.” Consider Psalm 144:12–15:

That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace: that our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thou-

sands and ten thousands in our streets: that our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people, that is in such a case.

Here David speaks on behalf of the men of the world; they are happy men who are all prosperous and successful. But he corrects them thus: "Happy is that people, whose God is the LORD." Jonah highly esteemed his gourd that perished in a night. The Jews highly esteemed their temple. So we are said to love the world when we set too high a value and estimation on the things of the world.

2. We love the world when our thoughts are fixed on the world. What a person loves, their thoughts are much upon. "O how love I thy law," said David. "It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97). We meditate most on the things we love. Now when our thoughts are consumed by the world, when it is in our thoughts early and late, we love the world and the things of it. Men are full of thoughts for the world—the pleasures, the honors, the profits, the contents, the delights of the world. Their thoughts are taken up with these things. James 4:13 says, "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." Their thoughts were fixed on the world, buying and selling, and getting gain. By this they testified of their love for the world. So in Psalm 49:11,

“Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names.” All their thoughts were taken up and busied with these things, which demonstrated their love for the world. Likewise, Philippians 3:19 speaks of earthly minded men. When men’s minds are on the earth and the things of the world, they love the earth and they love the world. They are inhabitants of the earth, seeking an inheritance here. So that is the second thing in which the love of the world consists: to have our thoughts taken up with the world, to mind the world, and to be carried toward the world.

3. Men are said to love the world when they desire the world. What men and women love, they desire much. Their desires are strong that way and run after those things. Love is a desire to be united with the thing loved. You know what is said in the commandments, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Ex. 20:17). When there is a covetous desire in the soul, that shows the soul is in love with the thing. Oh, how the desires of men are carried after and so strongly affectionate for the things of the world!

4. Love for the world is found in setting the heart on the things of the world. Psalm 62:10 warns us: “If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.” Many people

set their hearts on the things of the world. As we see in Hosea 4:17, "Ephraim is joined to idols." His heart was set on his idols. When the heart is set on things, it loves them. You know that Samuel told Saul not to set his heart on his father's donkeys (1 Sam. 9:20). Men's hearts are set on their goods, their cattle, their corn, their wine and oil, their pleasures and profits, and those things that the world holds out to them. But Colossians 3:2 reminds us: "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." Men settle their affections on the things of earth. One thing or another here below steals away their hearts, their hearts are taken up with them, and so they love these things. Matthew 24:38 says, "For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." Their affections were set on those things. When our affections are set on something, we love that thing.

5. We are said to love the world when we employ most of our strength in, on, and about the things of the world. When our chief strength is employed toward something, we commit our time and energy to it. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth," said Christ, "but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you" (John 6:27). When our chief labor concerns meat that perishes and other such things, we love them. When the bent of the soul is that way, there is love. When men rise early, lie down late, and spend their time that way, it is out of love. Romans

13:14 reminds us to “make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” When we make provision for the flesh and its lusts — to fulfill them, to gratify them, and satisfy them — it is evident that we love the world. Men follow it with eagerness, and their time and strength are spent that way.

6. We are said to love the world when we watch all opportunities and occasions to get the things of the world: to buy cheap and sell high; to get great estates, houses, lands, and things of that nature. “The children of this world,” said Christ, “are in their generation wiser than the children of light” (Luke 16:8). The children of the world are wise in their generation to get all advantages whereby to raise themselves. But, “hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail” (Amos 8:4). They watched for opportunities to swallow up the needy, to make a prey of the needy, to have their labor for a song, or for nothing at all. They are like the eagle that soars aloft, looking down to seize its prey. The heart ranges and roves abroad, seeking after one thing or another in the world to settle on. Yet remember the words of our Lord: “Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind” (Luke 12:29). Do not be like meteors in the air that fall to the earth. So many are like meteors in the air, hovering about; at last they fall on the earth.

Some will say, “If I had gotten such an estate, then I could take my ease and be at rest.” In Proverbs 18:11, the

wise man says, "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit." When a rich man gets wealth, he will settle upon it. It is his strong city, and he will rest there. It is as a high wall in his own mind, thinking it will defend him against all enemies, injuries, and wrongs. So we love the world when we watch for advantages in order to confide in, trust in, and secure ourselves by them.

7. We love the world when we endure great hardships for it. We will endure most anything for that which we love. Jacob loved Rachel, so he endured cold and heat, winter and summer, to accomplish his desires. So when men endure great difficulties, run through great dangers, and venture upon anything to get the world, they can be said to love it. It is said of our soldiers that they will risk their limbs and lives for pennies a day. And there are businessmen who will venture their souls for their credit. They do not consider it to be their credit or honor to put up with an injury or a wrong, but they will hazard their lives and souls to maintain their credit and honor. In Psalm 107:23–27 you may see how men endure the danger and storms at sea:

They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in the great waters; these see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to

the heaven, they go down again to the depths:
their soul is melted because of trouble.

They endure trouble that melts their very souls. "They reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end." Men will endure anything at sea to get the wealth of the world, which suggests they love the world. No amount of difficulties will quench their love; though they meet with storms and waves and danger, yet their love for the world is not extinguished. Nothing wearies them so long as they can get the world. But as for the things of God and the soul, the gospel and the Sabbath, how soon are men weary of these! Consider again Amos 8:4-5:

Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?

They are not weary of the world, yet they soon weary of the Sabbath and the ordinances of God. Men can endure any difficulty and danger to get estates, but they will hardly endure anything to get heaven, grace, or an interest in Christ.

8. Men love the world when they favor the world the most. When they most favor the things of the world in their discourses, they are in love with the world.

Christ tells you, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). When the world is in the heart, the heart loves it. Now it is evidence that the world is in the heart when our conversations are about the world and favor it most. In John 3:31, the Lord Christ says, “He that cometh from above is above all; he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth.” Earthly people favor the things of the earth in their speech. How savory discussions of gain, pleasures, and honors are to them. And in John 8:23 we read, “And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.” Christ was not of the world, and He was ever speaking of heaven and heavenly things — the things that concern the eternal good of men’s souls. They, however, were of the earth and spoke of the earth. Jesus referred to the scribes and Pharisees as ones who loved the applause of men and sought places of honor. They were of the earth; therefore, they savored the things of the earth and spoke of them much. Yet Christ was of heaven and spoke of heavenly things. They were minding their cumin, anise, mint, and tithes, while neglecting the weighty things of the Law. Their hearts were on those things.

It says in 1 John 4:5: “They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.” Men are of the world, and people love to hear them speak of the world. But when any speak of heavenly things, how unwelcome and unsavory are they?

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). They do not perceive the things of God, nor do they receive the things of God; such things are spiritual, and therefore are unwelcome to them. Therefore in Romans 8:5 the apostle says, “They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh.” They favor them, savor them, relish them, and delight in them. “But they that are after the Spirit [mind] the things of the Spirit.” Isaiah 58:13 says:

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.

God accounts someone a gracious, heavenly, and good person if instead of forsaking the Sabbath, he turns away from finding pleasure in his own will and words. Now our own words are the words of the world; the words of the flesh. It seems to demonstrate that a man is not of the world when he savors the things of God and does not turn his feet away from the Sabbath, but rather turns from doing his own pleasure on God’s holy day. But when we relish and savor the things of the world in our conversations, this shows we are glued to the world and love it.

9. A man loves the world when he mourns and laments for the things of the world that are taken from him. That which we love, we mourn over when we lose it. When men mourn exceedingly for a child, it shows that they loved their child. When men mourn and are afflicted for the loss of estate, names, friends, or relations, it shows that they loved the world. Rachel wept and refused to be comforted. Why? She had no children. How greatly are many people afflicted when they lose outward things such as credit, profit, honors, pleasures, estates, or relations. How they mourn and are discontent, hang down their head, and will not be comforted. They love the world and the things of the world.

10. We are said to love the world when we are resolved to be rich and will have the world one way or another. They will have the world by hook or by crook, as we used to say. First Timothy 6:9 speaks of "they that will be rich." They are resolved to be rich and to have the world, whatever comes of it. These men love the world indeed.

Now you see what the world is, and what it means to love it.