

Using, Not Abusing the World

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Read 1 Timothy 4:1–8; 1 John 2:15–17

One of the most fascinating sights on earth is a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis. In the process of metamorphosis, the caterpillar attaches itself to a stable object and forms a shell around itself. For a time, this chrysalis protects the worm while it develops its wings. Yet, once it has become a butterfly, it must break out of this shell, dry and expand its wings, and fly away. In some ways, the butterfly and its chrysalis illustrate the relationship of Christians to the world. God has provided a place for us in the world to protect us and meet our needs for a time as we change and grow in beauty. And yet, like butterflies, we must not cling to this world but be prepared to fly on to glory. Thus we must learn to use the world rightly, for it is but the chrysalis of the new creation.

My theme is, “Using, Not Abusing the World.”¹ So I begin by answering the question, “What do I mean by the world?” In the Bible, sometimes *world* means humanity in general, but we are not talking about using people. The New Testament also speaks of *world* as the sinful, corrupt system of beliefs, values, relationships, and activities of

1. This sermon is an expanded version of an address I gave for the Reformed Families Conference at the Creation Museum on June 12, 2015.

fallen mankind, but again, I am not, first and foremost, using the word in this way. When I speak of using but not abusing the world, I am referring to the resources and objects around us, such as apple trees and horses, iron and copper in the earth, and the cars and computers formed by man out of them. Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.”

It is fitting for us to address this topic, because how we relate to the world springs directly from the doctrine of creation. On the one hand, creation tells us that *the world came from God*. It is His creation and therefore it is fundamentally good. Genesis 1 opens and closes with these statements: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.... And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” Between those verses is the account of the creation of mankind in God’s image, with the delegated authority to rule over, use, and enjoy God’s world.

On the other hand, the doctrine of creation teaches us that *the world is not God*. Therefore we should not worship creation or confuse God with His creatures or visible images of them. That is precisely the horrible error that mankind has fallen into, as Paul explains in Romans 1. By rejecting the glory of God shining in His creation (Ps. 19:1), we have enslaved ourselves to His creatures by making idols of them. The very world God created good has become evil to us, not because it is evil, but because we twist it and elevate it and set our hearts upon it to be our God. That is what we mean by worldliness. We must resist and overcome this abuse in order to participate in the new creation in Christ.

As fallen human beings we live in tension regarding our proper relationship to the world. To explore what it

means to use the world as God’s gift but not abuse it as if it were God, we will consider each side of the tension: using the world, based on 1 Timothy 4:1–8, and not abusing the world, based on 1 John 2:15–17. Thus, my theme is “Using, Not Abusing the World” which I will address in two thoughts:

1. Use the world as God’s good gift (1 Timothy 4)
2. Do not abuse the world as if it were God (1 John 2)

Use the World as God’s Good Gift

The apostle Paul warns that we must guard against denying the goodness of God’s creation, and against legalistic or ascetic prohibitions that oppose enjoying God’s world. He went so far as to say that legalism and asceticism are from Satan. He wrote in 1 Timothy 4:1–5,

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Though people who promote legalistic rules may seem very spiritual and scrupulous, Paul says their consciences are actually profoundly damaged, “seared with a hot iron,” so that they are insensitive to right and wrong. Their teachings are the “doctrines of devils.” It is diabolical to forbid people to enjoy the sweet intimacy of marriage or the savory taste of ham or beef because “every creature of God is good.” Our Reformed heritage encourages us to acknowledge and rejoice in the beauty and goodness

of God's world. When we gaze upon towering mountains, listen to singing birds, and taste bread spread with butter and strawberry jam, we truly can confess, "The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9).

A stunning truth revealed in the Garden of Eden is that God not only created the world to meet our needs but also to give us pleasure. The Lord God did not feed Adam and Eve with dry crusts of bread but surrounded them with luscious fruit, beautiful trees, sparkling rivers, and land containing gold and gemstones (Gen. 2:8–15). So Paul declares that the living God "giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17).

John Calvin (1509–1564) said, "God provided food... not only to provide for necessity but also for delight and good cheer."² He then asked whether God would make flowers so beautiful and fragrant if He did not intend us to enjoy them with our eyes and noses. God also invented the diversity of colors. And God made some materials more precious and beautiful than others, such as gold, silver, ivory, and marble. Pierre Viret (1511–1571), a friend of Calvin, wrote, "God has not only provided in these things for the necessities of mankind, but also for their desires and pleasures, and has desired to join together an excellent beauty with profit and usefulness."³

So, if you are a believer, how are we to use the world as God's good gift? Let me give you three ways:

2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.10.2.

3. Pierre Viret, *Instruction Chretienne* (1564), cited by Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology, Volume One, The God Who Is: The Holy Trinity* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2008), 332.

Use the World with a Heart of Gratitude

Paul's words to Timothy give us practical directions on how we are to use this beautiful, profitable, pleasurable world. In 1 Timothy 4:4 Paul says, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." If we view the world as God's creation, then every good thing is a gift from heaven above (James 1:17). So we should always look beyond the gift to the Giver. Calvin said, "All things were created for us that we might recognize the Author and give thanks for his kindness toward us."⁴ I am not speaking of a superficial "thank you" that we say to be polite and then go off to focus on the gift and ignore the person who gave it. That would fill the mind with various things but stupefy that heart towards God.

Gratitude deems the Giver to be a greater treasure than the gift. We must not use God to get more of what we want; we must use the world to get more of God. Every glimpse of majesty we see in the starry galaxies will then make us say, "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:1). Every drop of honey or maple syrup that we taste will then make us think, "God is so good!"

Psalms 148 calls upon every part of the world to praise the Lord because He made it. The psalmist provides us with a catalog of God's creation: the heights of heaven and the hosts of angels dwelling in them; the sun, moon, stars, and clouds above us in the firmament; sea monsters in ocean depths or the fire, hail, snow, vapors, and storms that sweep over the dry land; mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars; wild beasts and cattle, creeping things and flying birds; kings, generals, and judges of the earth; young men and maidens, old men and little children. He says, "Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven"

4. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.10.3.

(v. 13). Creation moves us to praise the Creator because the cause is always greater than the effect. God's glory transcends everything the world can offer us.

Gratitude is love returned for love bestowed. True thankfulness is a childlike response of love to the Father who has so greatly loved us in Jesus Christ. It views all of creation through gospel eyes, seeing the world as the handiwork of the God who "sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). We respond by saying, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). In this, as John Owen (1616–1683) explained, God's children have communion with their heavenly Father. They receive His gifts by faith in Christ, and "they make suitable returns unto him."⁵ They use the world with a heart of gratitude.

Use the World with a Mindset of a Pilgrim

We use the world in a way that is holy and pleasing to God when we do so as directed by the truths revealed in Holy Scripture, or as Paul says, as "sanctified by the word of God" (1 Tim. 4:5). We must not use the things of God's creation to break God's commandments. But we must also allow the teachings of the Bible to shape how we think about the world and our activities in it. We have already discussed the doctrine of creation. Without faith in the biblical teaching on God's creation of the world, we cannot think rightly about the world or act rightly towards it.

Another major doctrine of the Word of God that Paul has in mind here is the return of Christ and the end of the age. In verse 1 he refers to "the latter times." In verse 8 he mentions "the life...which is to come." He returns to the theme of using this present world in light of the world to come in chapter 6 (vv. 12, 14–15, and 19). We must always

5. John Owen, *Of Communion with God*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1850–1853; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 2:22.

view the things of this world in light of “the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:14).

We must use this world knowing that it is neither our true home nor our lasting treasure (Matt. 6:24–34; Heb. 11:8–10). Calvin said Christ “teaches us to travel as pilgrims in this world.”⁶ We will know how to make “the right use of earthly benefits” if we remember that “the present life is for his people as a pilgrimage on which they are hastening toward the Heavenly Kingdom.”⁷ If you are a student visiting another country, you enjoy your time there but you always have in mind that you will eventually go home. In the world, your goal should not be to accumulate large quantities of possessions. You may use what you need and sample what you like, but you should constantly ask whether this possession or that activity will help you along to heaven, or hinder you. We are not tourists in this world living for pleasure and entertainment, but wanderers banished from paradise and longing to return. Calvin wrote, “For, if heaven is our homeland, what else is the earth but our place of exile?”⁸

The Puritans picked up Calvin’s pilgrimage theme and developed it further. The pilgrim mentality, like a multifaceted diamond, includes at least six facets:

- a biblical outlook for our faith and practice;
- a godly outlook that promotes conscientious living in the childlike fear of God in our duty to God, to family, and to country;
- a churchly outlook that is concerned preeminently with God’s glory and the worship, fellowship,

6. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.3.

7. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.10.1.

8. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.9.4.

doctrine, government, and discipline of Christ's church;

- a warfaring outlook, since the church on earth wages war against indwelling sin (for the remains of our old nature lie dormant within us like a volcano that can burn out of control at any time), and against a beckoning, seducing, yet hostile world that does not agree to cease-fires and does not sign peace treaties;
- a methodical outlook that trains the believer to use the spiritual disciplines faithfully and regularly every day; and
- a two-worldly outlook, which enables us to have heaven “in our eye” while we are walking on earth, so that we are willing to deny ourselves anything that would hinder us from running the Christian race with our eyes on Jesus and glory (Heb. 12:1–2).⁹

The same Word of God that teaches us that we are pilgrims also teaches us that all mankind is headed for one of two ultimate destinations. Therefore, a pilgrim mindset is also an evangelistic mindset. We are not to envy the rich and powerful but to pray for their salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:1–5). We are to use the world with one eye on judgment day. This perspective makes us willing to make great sacrifices in this life so that other people will find eternal life. It also reminds us that God will call us to account for how we used the world, and whether we did so in a manner that advanced God's purposes and kingdom.¹⁰

9. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 843–58.

10. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.10.5.

Use the World with an Attitude of Dependence

Paul says that the creatures of God are “sanctified by the word of God *and prayer*” (emphasis added). We thus honor God by receiving our food with thanksgiving. However, that goes far beyond saying grace at meals. The word *prayer* specifically means appealing to someone in power to take action.¹¹ It reminds us that since God is the Creator and Lord of this world, we are dependent upon Him and receive all things by His grace alone. We express this dependence in continual prayer for God to supply the needs of His people.

Praying without ceasing involves humility. To lift up your soul to the Lord daily is to take the posture of one who cannot get by his own strength what he needs and desires. Whereas sinners look to the power, riches, and oppressive schemes of men, God tells us that men are lighter than air on His scales, and we must instead trust in the Lord and pour out our hearts before Him (Ps. 62:8–11).

This dependence teaches us contentment, for it is the exact opposite of the entitlement mentality that says, “I deserve these good things. And I deserve better.” If God created the world, then He has the right to do with it as He pleases. He is the Lord, and we are His servants, created for His glory and for His pleasure. Calvin said that Christians “should know how to bear poverty peaceably and patiently, as well as to bear abundance moderately.”¹²

A heart of gratitude, the mindset of a pilgrim, and an attitude of dependence distinguish a truly Christian use of the world from secular and pagan approaches. In union with Jesus Christ, we know the Creator of the world as our heavenly Father. Do you know Him as your loving and forgiving Father through Christ? He gave you life and

11. See ἔντευξις and its cognate verb (ἐντυγχάνω) in Acts 25:24; Rom. 8:27, 34; 11:2; 1 Tim. 2:1; 4:5; Heb. 7:25.

12. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:10.4.

each breath that you take (Acts 17:28). He commands you to turn away from the false gods and idols to which you have given yourself. Just as surely as He raised Christ from the dead, so He will judge the world through Christ in righteousness. How you have used the world will reveal whether you lived for His glory or your own. By God's grace, come to Jesus Christ, and He will teach you to use the world as His own good gift, and for His glory.

Do Not Abuse the World as If It Were God

Although the world was created by God and is good, we have misused and abused the world with our worldliness. John describes worldliness in 1 John 2:15–17: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

Here John does not use *world* to refer to God's created order, but to man's sinful disorder. John is talking about Satan's kingdom of darkness, which includes all people who are under his rule and living according to the standards of this world. And he is referring to all the “things,” whether ideas and teachings or material possessions and physical experiences, that the world uses to promote its agenda. Calvin wrote, “By the *world* understand everything connected with the present life, apart from the kingdom of God and the hope of eternal life.... In the world are pleasures, delights, and all those allurements by which man is captivated, so as to withdraw himself from God.”¹³

13. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 186 (1 John 2:15).

Worldliness is human nature without God. The goal of worldly people is to live horizontally rather than vertically, to move forward rather than to look upward. Worldly people seek material prosperity and despise holiness. They burst with selfish desires and disdain heartfelt supplications. They are controlled by worldly pursuits of this world's trinity of pleasure, profit, and position. Each of us by nature is worldly. As sinners, we belong to this world; it is our natural habitat. We are born with a worldly mind that is "not subject to the law of God, neither can be" (Rom. 8:7). As much as we were tied to our mothers by an umbilical cord, so we were tied to the world from the time of our conception and birth. Our understanding has been darkened (Eph. 4:18) by the guilt of Adam's sin imputed to us and the pollution of his sin passed on to us (Rom. 5:12–21; Ps. 51:5). We are naturally and thoroughly self-seeking and self-indulgent—without regard for God, yes, even prone to hate God!

That doesn't mean we are not masters at masking our worldliness in our outward behavior. John's teaching shows us that worldliness can be very subtle, for it pertains to what we love in our hearts, not just our outward behavior. Worldliness does not always openly reject God. Worldliness can be in men who speak Christian words or even claim to be Christian leaders (1 John 4:1, 5). Worldliness can co-exist with high moral standards and lofty idealism. One can be stained by the world by showing favoritism to the rich, by having a bitterly destructive tongue, by getting into quarrels because you are not getting what you want, or by taking advantage of your employees and workers (see the Epistle of James). A straight-A student who does not go to drinking parties can still be worldly.

Worldliness is not always blatant conformity to popular culture, either. We often tend to think of worldliness as the young woman who shops all the time for the trendiest

clothing, and dates one young man after another looking for someone to make her feel good about herself. Or perhaps we think of a young man who is addicted to the latest technology or to sports trivia. In reality, a monk eating vegetables in a hut with no internet connection can be worldly as he lives by man-made rules for spirituality (Col. 2:20–23).

How then does worldliness display itself? Here are three ways worldliness shows itself, so that you can discern it in yourself and in your children.

We Abuse the World with Selfish Greed

Worldliness is human love not ruled by the love of God. John writes in 1 John 2:15, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” The Bible defines worldliness as self-centered love for people and things in the world, in contrast to love that flows first and foremost to God. It is self-love that has put out its own eyes and gone astray.

As a result, John says in verse 16 that worldliness is love degraded into lust, not just sexual lust but greedy desire of any kind. It uses God and people to satisfy our craving for things that please our sensual natures, surrounding ourselves with beautiful and valuable treasures, or boosting our images among friends. Worldliness is exemplified in the recent advertisement featuring a luxury car emblazoned with the words, “Thou shalt covet,” which is a shocking perversion of the tenth commandment.

God created man to enjoy all things in creation by receiving God’s grace, relying on God’s power, obeying God’s will, and pursuing God’s glory. But fallen man has rejected God’s love for us and cast love for God out of his heart. He now loves only himself and the things of God’s creation with a wrongful and idolatrous love. Even if

he affirms the doctrine of creation with his lips, he has rejected its application to his heart. Instead he chooses the world to be his God, and loves it with all his heart. He takes the gift and scorns the Giver.

This form of worldliness often disguises itself as a matter of human *need*. Natural and healthy desires grow into ravenous and roaring lions, demanding satisfaction with the words, “I need it.” The more we feed these monsters, the larger and stronger they grow, until they devour our very souls. John contrasts this with our true need to do the will of God. The meat and bread of our souls is to do the will of the God who made us and calls us to glorify Him.

These two loves are incompatible. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Matt. 6:24a). Love of the world will destroy us. Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:10, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” One love must rule our lives: a holy passion for God and the things of God. But since the fall of man, our souls have been pulled as by hook and line to abuse the world.

We Abuse the World with a Mindset of Materialism

Worldliness values physical appearance more than the image of God in a person’s soul. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life conspire to make us crave things for the body. Often this is a yearning for beautiful, expensive, and pleasant things. We live in a world that schools our children to value possessions and outward appearances. Our children will covet a good-looking girlfriend or boyfriend, expensive cars, in-style clothes, new technology, and many other material things. Our daughters compete to be the most attractive. Our boys want

to be the strongest or most successful in sports, school, or work. Ironically, this preoccupation with the physical and the material may be turned upside down into a sinful abuse of our bodies through religious asceticism, cutting oneself, or eating disorders.

Worldliness involves a preoccupation with temporal things instead of the eternal kingdom of God. John says, “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:17). Few things distract our children from serving God as much as neglecting the spiritual and eternal. Our children often view life through the lens of the present. They have trouble learning lessons from the past, and they fail to see that their decisions and choices will have consequences in the future. Instant gratification rules their ethics and becomes their all. This lack of perspective greatly harms our children. When we and our children only think in terms of the temporal, the earthly, and the fleshly, it is no wonder that the things of the world appear so important. If this life were the only life we all lived for, surely we’d all want to make the most of it (Eccl. 2:24).

But this world’s pleasures are temporary. Calvin said, “What is most precious in the world and deemed especially desirable, is nothing but a shadowy phantom.”¹⁴ The world is our passage, not our portion. God has marked the day of our death on His calendar. What will you gain if you gain the whole world, but lose your own soul? As Spurgeon bluntly put it, you will end up with nothing but a coffin on your back and grave dust in your mouth. But eternal glory awaits the child of God. As believers, we understand that we are only renters here; our real home is in heaven.

14. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, 188 (1 John 2:17).

We Abuse the World with a Spirit of Pride

Worldliness feeds the pride of life. Pride is a dreadful sin. Other sins flee from God, but pride turns on God, attacks Him, and seeks to usurp His throne. That is the character of pride from our fall in Adam until our dying breath. As George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673) said, “Pride is the shirt of the soul, put on first and put off last.”

Pride comes in all varieties, forms, and shapes. Jonathan Edwards said that pride is like an onion—if you peel off one layer, there is always another layer underneath. Oh, the depth and tragedy of our heart’s pride! No wonder then that of the seven things Proverbs 6:16–19 says God hates, four of them are connected to pride.

Pride is not always easy to identify. Our children can be prideful with good grades, and they can be prideful with bad grades. They can be prideful when they are complimented by their parents, and prideful when their parents rebuke them. Children can take pride in the amount of material possessions they have, and they can be prideful about the things they don’t have. Pride can be present when our children sin willingly, and pride can be present when our children attempt to do what’s good. Man’s very nature and essence rests in a prideful estimation of himself. We need to teach our children to be God-centered, which will enable them to be others-centered (Rom. 12:1–16).

Worldly pride wants to please sinful man and not God. This is part of what John means when he says, “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” We naturally seek to please those whom we love. Christ says in John 5:42, “But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.” How was that demonstrated? In verse 44, Jesus explains, “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” Men with worldly pride live for the smiles of men rather than the smile of God.

Our children, from their youngest years, will hear the message of people-pleasing preached to them by the world. They will be pressured to be cool, attractive, or fashionable in the eyes of others, such as the boy down the street, or a boss at a part-time job, or a college professor. The world will seek to squeeze our children into its mold by demanding that they please people regardless of how corrupt or deceived those people may be. Worldliness then is the hollow shell of our love for people and things minus the love of God. It is the sad, empty, and blasphemous love of the world.

Overcoming Worldliness

Our nation has fallen into gross abuse of the world. Rather than cultivating a heart of gratitude, America has a heart of greed. Covetousness and the sense of entitlement prevail. The pursuit of happiness has degenerated into the pursuit of pleasure and affluence. Instead of the mindset of pilgrims on the road to heaven, Americans often have a mindset of materialism in which happiness is defined by dollar signs and possessions. Whereas the doctrine of creation instills a spirit of dependence exhibited in prayer, our nation has lifted itself up in pride and people-pleasing.

But thanks be to God, Jesus Christ still saves sinners. Jesus Christ says in John 15:19, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” Rejection of worldliness requires more than just head knowledge of biblical doctrine; it requires a new heart via the Holy Spirit. When the love of God enters our lives through the gospel and dwells within us (1 John 4:7–12), we may overcome the world through faith in Christ (1 John 5:4–5). But the warnings in the New Testament against worldliness remind us that we

must constantly watch and fight against the world as long as we live in it.

I conclude with some specific directions on how to help your family fight worldliness:

First, *encourage your children with God's promises in the gospel*. Sometimes we are overwhelmed by the command to stand against the world. But Scripture tells us that greater is Christ who is within us than he who is in the world. Remember the promise of Christ in John 16:33, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Remind your children to focus on Christ's redeeming death on the cross. Teach them that God tells us to deny worldly lusts and live righteously by pointing us to the Savior who gave Himself to redeem and purify His people (Titus 2:12, 14). There is more power in the blood of Christ than in all the temptations of Satan and every wicked person on this planet. Remind your children also of the promise that Christ will come again in glory (Titus 2:13). The world's threats and rewards will seem weak indeed if our children can see them in light of judgment day. Teach your children to seek grace to follow Christ and, if they do, help them to see themselves as citizens of a heavenly realm and as pilgrims who are only passing through this world.

Second, *teach your children how to practice self-denial*. Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts means denying ourselves and putting our sinful desires to death by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13). The world tells us to say, “Me, me, me” in gratifying our desires and passions. The way to combat the pride of worldliness is to help our children live in self-denial. One of the best places to begin is in the home. Help them see the importance of cheerfully serving their brothers and sisters. Give them jobs around the house and encourage them to serve in their church and community.

Third, *rid your homes of needless temptations*. John said us that part of worldliness is the lust of the eyes. What are you allowing to enter the eyes and ears of your child's soul? It is tragic to hear of parents who allow their children to watch inappropriate movies, read lewd and materialistic magazines or blogs, buy music that exploits women, or download evil pictures or text on their cell phones. Guard your children's access to electronic devices. Review the books and music they choose. Most of all, talk to them about these things. Use family worship to talk about the lust of the eyes—what it is, how to fight it, how to practice purity, and why sex is a joyful part of marriage.

Fourth, *fill your children's minds and hearts with what is good and true*. Limiting our children's access to electronic media or clothing is not enough to guard them from worldliness, for the world is in their hearts. We must therefore do everything we can to see Colossians 3:16 fulfilled in our homes, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Instead of providing entertainment that makes them passive consumers, do things together as a family to make them active friends to one another.

Fifth, *train them to see that no created thing is neutral ground*. All things exist for God's glory and are only properly used out of love for God. Though the objects are not inherently sinful, the uncleanness within us will make all things unclean unless we wash them in the blood of Christ, use them according to His Word, and devote them for His praise. There is no area of your children's life over which Christ does not claim Lordship. Material possessions, personal relationships, families, school work, work, spare time, entertainment are all tools the devil can use to

conquer our children with worldliness. Teach your children how to use everything humbly and in gratitude to God.

Sixth, *be a model for your children in fighting against the world*. Don't just teach these things to your children; do them yourself. Titus 2:7–8 says, "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you." If modeling righteousness is the responsibility of the minister in the church, how much more must fathers and mothers be "a pattern of good works" for their children? Many children struggle with worldliness because dad and mom have ceased to struggle with it. Many parents live as people-pleasers, regard outward appearances as more important than internal appearance, love material things, live with a temporal outlook on life, and feed on pride. How then can they expect their children to do otherwise?

The Dutch preacher Willem Teellinck (1579–1629) compared the world to a monster with sharp horns that it uses to attack people. One of those horns, he said, is "wrong yet celebrated and very distinguished role models."¹⁵ The church's defense against this horn is the "examples of pious and godly persons in every age" who "lived undefiled by the world."¹⁶ Which will you be: a horn by which the world pierces your children, or an example of godliness for them to follow?

Seventh, *pray for God to give your family kingdom grace*. As we have seen, worldliness is not simply external; it is an issue of the heart. As such, we cannot merely regulate our children's outward behavior. To successfully beat back worldliness, our children need new hearts. So pray

15. Willem Teellinck, *The Path of True Godliness*, trans. Annemie Godbehere, ed. Joel Beeke (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 65.

16. Teellinck, *The Path of True Godliness*, 94.

earnestly for your children that they will come to embrace the gospel through faith and to trust in Jesus Christ as their only hope of beating back worldliness. Without prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit, everything we do for our children will ultimately fail. However, through believing prayer we overcome. Although the Heidelberg Catechism says, “our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, cease not to assault us,” it also assures us that the Lord will “preserve and strengthen us by the power of [His] Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes till at last we obtain a complete victory.”¹⁷

May God give us grace to live in the tension of using but not abusing the world. May we never fail to acknowledge God’s overflowing goodness to us in providing us with the necessities and pleasures of creation. May we learn to depend upon Him for all our needs, constantly praying for His blessings and praising Him for His mercies. May we ever live in such a way that we recognize that there is more evil in the smallest sin than there is in the greatest affliction and that there is more good in the smallest good work than there is in the greatest prosperity.

May we make good use of everything God gives us to help us on our journey to the eternal city, never forgetting that the hundred-dollar bills of this world are not worth the pennies of heaven. Let us also remember the lesson of the muck-rake in part two of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Bunyan wrote that Christiana was taken into a room where a man held a tool for raking the dirt. Another person stood by him, offering him a beautiful, heavenly crown in exchange for the muck-rake. But the man never looked up at the crown above his head and paid no attention to the

17. Heidelberg Catechism (LD 52, Q. 127), *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 2006.

offer. Instead, he kept looking down, giving all his attention to gathering up grass, sticks, and dirt. Bunyan said that this man was “a man of this world.”¹⁸ May God grant that through our words, example, training, and prayers, our families may look up from the dirt and sticks of this world to see the glory of God in Christ and gladly trade the muck-rake for a crown.

18. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1895; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 233.