

1 John 2:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Analysis

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. John contrasts the world's transience with eternal reality. "The world passeth away" (ho kosmos paragetai)—present tense indicates ongoing process. The world-system with its values, pursuits, and pleasures is in continuous dissolution. Paragetai means to pass by, disappear, fade away. What seems solid and permanent is actually ephemeral. "And the lust thereof" (kai hē epithymia autou)—not just the world but its desires pass away. The objects of worldly lust prove temporary and ultimately unsatisfying.

The contrast is stark: "but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (ho de poiōn to thelēma tou theou menei eis ton aiōna). "Doeth" (poiōn) is present participle—habitual practice, lifestyle orientation. "The will of God" (to thelēma tou theou) encompasses God's revealed purposes and commands. "Abideth for ever" (menei eis ton aiōna)—menei means remains, endures; eis ton aiōna means into the age, eternally. This isn't merely existing forever but abiding in relationship with the eternal God, participating in eternal life.

The choice is clear: invest in the temporary (world and its lusts) or the eternal (God's will). Worldly pursuits provide momentary satisfaction but ultimate emptiness. Doing God's will aligns one with eternal reality, producing lasting fruit and abiding life. This isn't works-righteousness but recognition that regenerate hearts desire and do God's will, thereby evidencing eternal life already possessed (John 5:24).

Historical Context

The contrast between temporal and eternal was central to biblical thinking but revolutionary in context. Greek philosophy recognized matter's mutability versus eternal forms, but didn't connect ethics to eternal destiny as Christianity did. Stoicism taught detachment from transient pleasures, but offered no hope of personal eternal existence. Epicureanism pursued pleasure precisely because life is brief. Christianity proclaimed both the world's transience and personal eternal life for believers.

This verse provided crucial perspective for persecuted Christians. Roman power, pagan culture, and material prosperity seemed permanent and attractive. Yet John declares: these are passing. Suffering for righteousness, though painful temporarily, aligns with eternal reality. Many believers lost property, status, even lives for refusing worldly compromise. John's assurance sustained them: temporary loss, eternal gain.

Medieval monasticism sometimes misapplied this verse, viewing all material existence as evil to be escaped. The Reformation recovered biblical balance: the created world is good (Genesis 1), but the fallen world-system is passing. Believers engage creation while refusing worldly values. Puritan piety emphasized living "with eternity's values in view"—making daily choices based on eternal weight, not temporal pleasure.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does meditating on the world's transience change your attitude toward worldly pursuits and possessions you currently value?
2. What would it look like practically to invest more in eternal realities (doing God's will) than temporary pleasures?
3. How can you maintain engagement with the world (evangelism, cultural engagement) while remembering its passing nature?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ὁ κόσμος παράγεται καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία αὐτοῦ ὁ
And G3588 the world passeth away And G3588 the lust thereof G3588
G2532 G2889 G3855 G2532 G1939 G846

δὲ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν
but he that doeth G3588 the will G3588 of God abideth for G3588
G1161 G4160 G2307 G2316 G3306 G1519

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ever
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Additional Cross-References

Matthew 24:35 (Parallel theme): Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

1 Corinthians 7:31 (Parallel theme): And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

Romans 12:2 (References God): And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

1 Peter 4:2 (References God): That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

Hebrews 10:36 (References God): For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

Mark 3:35 (References God): For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.

1 Peter 1:5 (References God): Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 (References God): For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

Psalms 143:10 (References God): Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.

John 4:14 (Parallel theme): But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

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