In 1980, a very corny and very predictable movie called, *Urban Cowboy*, was made by Paramount Pictures. It starred John Travolta and Debra Winger, who played the roles of Bud and Sissy and its location was a Houston, Texas, nightclub called Gilley's, which was billed as, "The Largest Honkytonk in the World." It was so big (44,000 square feet), that you couldn't see from one end of the dance floor to the other. If you happened to have seen the movie, or have been there, you'll also remember the mechanical bull ride that challenged the virility of the mostly cowboy clientele and gave them a chance to show off for the ladies.

A country singer by the name of Johnny Lee was the leader of the house band at Gilley's when the movie was made and he became a huge success in the country music field when the movie was released. If there were any redeeming qualities of the movie, it was probably the music, which was actually quite good—as secular music goes. One of the songs topped the country charts as soon as it came off the sound track. It was called, "Looking For Love In All The Wrong Places." It was a song about lonely people looking for other lonely people and hoping to find love and acceptance and someone who really cared—for longer than a one night stand. The lyrics are revealing. Perhaps you've been where the song takes us. Perhaps you're there right now.

Well I spent a lifetime looking for you
Single bars and good time lovers were never true
I was looking for love in all the wrong places
Looking for love in too many faces
Searching their eyes looking for traces
Of one I'm dreaming of
Hoping to find a friend and a lover
I'll bless the day I discover
Another—looking for love

If you'll allow me to also be a bit corny and predictable, I'd like to ask you a much overworked question, by the way of introduction to my sermon this morning, "What's wrong with this picture?" Everything,—according to God.

Where do we find true love anyway? Are there any "right places?" Where does God encourage us to look or warn us not to look? Does he have a better plan than the "Gilley's" of this world? (By the way, if you're ever in Houston, don't bother to look for Gilley's—someone burned it to the ground several years ago). As always, God's word—in this case, 1 Jn. 2:15-17 is the best place for us to begin our search for love.

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*
— 1 Jn. 2:15

There's something dangerous about this world that the apostle John warns us about. He breaks down this danger into two major divisions, "the world" and "anything in the world." Doesn't that cover everything?

Let's start by understanding what is meant by "the world?" Certainly he doesn't mean the physical or natural world. How many of us don't love the trees, the mountains, the ocean and rivers—the blue skies and the snow? There's a classic hymn we sing in this regard, part of it says:

This is my Father's world
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas
His hand the wonders wrought

One of my favorite scriptures in this regard is Psm. 19, which starts out by saying, "The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament declares his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Psm. 19:1-4). God's physical world is beautiful and magnificent and he made it just for us to enjoy. This is not the world John is referring to.

Neither is the danger in this world the people of the world. God said he loved the people of this world so much that he
gave his Son for them (Jn. 3:16). The world of humanity is not the world we are not to love. Our love for people is what will help lead them to Jesus Christ.

What is the world we are not to love? The word "world" in the original language is kosmos. It has several meanings but the one John uses here refers to the present world system. It's a world order that is opposed to the kingdom of God. It's a world that closes the door on prayer and attempts to take God out of all public life. It belittles the sanctity of life by endorsing abortions and euthanasia, while at the same time putting forth great effort and expense into saving the whales and the minnows.

One writer says the word "world" in this context always comes with the "idea of transience, worthlessness, and evil both physical and moral, the seat of cares, temptations, and irregular desires" (Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary, p.881). Jesus spoke of this kind of world in his Last Supper discourse: "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" (Jn. 15:18). We're talking about a world system that is against Christ. John warns us to not love that world system or anything in it, if we do we will devoid ourselves of the Father's love. Now he is even more explicit in his description of what that world is like—so that we can easily recognize it.

For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. — 1 Jn. 2:16

Everyday it seems we get another peek into more of the greedy scandals of corporate America. Five thousand dollar shower curtains, two thousand dollar trash cans. Sinful man uses incredible energy and ingenuity to satisfy his cravings. There's no limit to the evil fallen man can propose. So God tells us through his apostle—stay away from the traps of the world's system. Then why don't we? There are three areas of concern that we're warned about in this regard and everyone of us is susceptible and vulnerable.

What are "the cravings of sinful man"? If you've ever been around a drug addict, you'll witness such a craving. All they think about is their next fix. Their bodies scream for that high—and they will risk everything to satisfy that desire. To lie, steal and even kill means nothing in light of their physical need. That's the word picture we get here. The "flesh" refers not so much to the physical part of our being as it does our lower or fallen nature. The apostle Paul told us of the battle he had with this lower nature. Are we any different? "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it" (Rom. 7:18-20).

"The lust of the eyes" refers to that part of us that wants everything we see that would enhance our life-style. Most of it is unattainable but we want it anyway. I've had church people (bless their misguided hearts), tell me that they play the Lotto because if they win big they'll give the money to the church. No, they won't. They'll spend it on "the lust of the eyes" and never look back. That's our sinful nature and that leads us to the third leg of this worldly trio, the braggart, or the one who boasts "of what he has and does." I call it our quest for fame.

Fame makes it's appeal in every magazine, billboard, radio and television commercial we see. Buy this product and you'll look like a movie star. Dress like this and you'll attract all the boys. Drink this beverage and you'll have all the fun. Then you can tell everyone else how good and how smart you are and they will bow at your feet. The word used here for the boaster is "alazon." An alazon was a wanderer who would brag to anyone who would listen about things that he didn't have. He would stand on the seashore and claim to be waiting for his ship to come in with its treasures. It's interesting that the antonym of the alazon is the word for one who is humble, who places himself on the ground floor.

This discussion is talking about the world's philosophy of life. "You only go around once it life," the beer commercial chanted, so "grab all the gusto you can!" Christians are buying into it by the boatload—to the degree that in the most important statistics regarding our life-styles, there is often little difference with the rest of the world. That's why God wants us to listen to his warnings.

The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. — 1 Jn. 2:17

Our world is in the process of passing away. All of what it offers as glitter is heading for a meltdown. The apostle Peter told us, "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (2 Ptr. 3:10b). Latch on to it and it will take you right along with it because it's not of God. What is of God is doing his will and that produces eternal life.

Will your striving after the wind take you past the gate to heaven? Will a life of pleasure seeking now and conformity to the world's philosophy produce a life of torment later? As the world beckons for your allegiance will you choose a better place to look for love? I will. Maranatha.

Sermon Notes are excerpts from a sermon preached at Heights Christian Church by Pastor Don Kimbro