

LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD

STUDY SIX

Strong Talk on the Cosmos

1 John 2:12–17

May the Lord help us understand these few verses tucked away in the middle of an ancient letter written on an isolated island in the Aegean Sea. May we realize that those words, though written centuries ago, are ever relevant, and they speak to twenty-first century people as if written yesterday. May we all take them to heart. May we remember these are warnings to be taken seriously.

—Charles R. Swindoll

CLEAR-EYED and resolute, John’s wrinkled skin and frail bones bore a heart as young and vigorous and fiery as it was when Jesus named him and his brother, “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17).

In this study, we explore an earnest passage in John’s letter and observe how it paints a portrait of this elderly apostle’s dogged determination to teach the young church what it means to live in the “world.”

John’s nearly ten decades of life taught him to take seriously the threats of Satan, who has made the cosmos his playground of darkness. So, like a wartime colonel, John issues us strong warnings and direction mingled with hope and assurance.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Strong Talk on the Cosmos

1 John 2:12–17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Ask your Father to bless your time in His Word.

Father, please use this quiet time in a special way to draw me closer to You. Help me to see as John saw. Help me to have the assurance as John had. Increase my love for You and my love for others so I can shine brightly in a world so in love with the dark. In the name of Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

After years on the spiritual battlefield, John knew the enemy’s tactic to infiltrate the church. He warned about those who say they have “fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness” (1 John 1:6). According to John, someone who claims to know God but “doesn’t obey God’s commands . . . is a liar” (2:4).

John exposed false teachers and their false teaching. He also distinguished between authentic and phony Christianity. Now John directs our gaze to our wider environment, so we might see how rebellion against God and self-love characterize so much of our culture. He calls all the “troops” to attention and issues a winning battle plan on how to live godly in an ungodly world.



Observation: You Have Overcome the Evil One

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by observing the flow of the passage, how the streams of thought develop.¹ Observe [1 John 2:12–17](#). First notice how the text divides into two sections of three verses each: verses 12–14 and verses 15–17. Give each section a summary title.

Section Verses	Section Titles
2:12–14	
2:15–17	



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John's Audience—1 John 2:12–14

Whom did John address in *1 John 2:12–14*? Why do you think John addressed three different age groups?

So I'm talking not just to the adolescents, not just to the teenagers, not to the young women and men who are present, but to all of us—the spiritually mature as well as the new Christians. Remember, you are susceptible. You can fall into the system of this world. So take heed: this is no time for arrogance. —Chuck Swindoll

Along with stages of maturity, John listed specific benefits for believing in Christ, which apply to all Jesus-followers (1 John 2:12–14). How many benefits did John name? What were these benefits?

A Cosmic Warning—1 John 2:15–17

How did John describe the world in *2:15–16*?



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Looking for contrasts helps us carefully observe a passage. For example, notice the contrasts between “love the world” and “love of the Father” in 2:15 and between “from this world” and “from the Father” in 1 John 2:16. John used a contrast of time in 2:17. What did he contrast, and how did he do so?

Having observed all six verses, let’s dig a little deeper into the meaning of John’s warnings and commands.



Interpretation: Do Not Love the World

Don’t forget to use your resources during this step of your Bible study. Helpful references include *Chuck’s commentary* and the online commentary, *Constable’s Notes*, at NetBible.org.

Begin interpretation by considering the connection between John’s two sections and their key points. How do the benefits of believing in Jesus listed in *1 John 2:12–14*, such as sins forgiven and knowing the Father, help us live in such a hostile spiritual environment (*1 John 2:15–17*)?



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Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: World

What does John mean by “the world”? In his usage here, the Greek term *kosmos* [2889] refers to the system of this present age before the return of Christ. This world is led by Satan, who works against Christ and His people. It's therefore hostile to righteousness. The world magnifies humanity, celebrates depravity, and rejects God's word. In this negative sense, the world's values, pleasures, pastimes, aspirations, and even attitudes have no room for God, no respect for Christ, and no regard for His followers. John uses the term *kosmos* in this sense throughout the letter, but in 2:15–17 alone, he uses the term six times as part of his strong warning.²

In 1 John 2:16, John described the world in three ways—none of which flow from the heart of God or align with the will of God. Using your study resources, explain each of those ways and where you see them operating in people in your circle of life.

In 2:17, John said the world is “passing” (or “fading”) away using a present-tense verb describing a gradual, ongoing occurrence. What did he emphasize by saying it this way? Why is his subsequent contrast on the one who does the will of God important? How is this relevant today?



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The world's system opposes God and His truth. Those who love God do not love the world's system in the same way that those who love life do not love cancer. The world's cancer—it's love for darkness and hostility against God—causes it to embrace what cannot give true life. When we draw near to Christ, the world's alluring and destructive power is broken.

John emphasized that sin is very real. Everyone reaps the moral and spiritual consequences of the deeds they morally and spiritually sow. As the old saying puts it, “if you pick up one end of the stick, you also pick up the other.”

But we have hope! God promised He would wipe out evil and remake the world so that its future goodness would shine brighter than its former goodness (*Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 65:17–18; 66:22–23*). John encouraged his readers, including us, “All that's bad will be passing away. The dawn of the new age has broken forth!”



Correlation: Do Not Go Out of the World

With such intense language against our world, one might feel a pull to flee human interaction altogether. But that is not what God wants. Jesus does not call us to monkish separation. The following passages illustrate this truth.

Read the apostle Paul's words in *1 Corinthians 5:9–13*. How did the Corinthian church misunderstand Paul's instructions about church discipline? How does this passage complement the truth about the world as portrayed in *1 John 2:12–17*?



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Read Jesus' prayer for the church in [John 17:13–21](#). How did He pray for His followers' relationship with the world? What safeguards strengthen believers while they live in the world?

Just as Jesus entered this present darkness and shined the light of love and truth through living a pure and Godward life, we are to do the same. Christians should uphold a glistening, attractive purity; speak a divine, flickering truth; and live with a glowing, selfless love.

Application: Insulation and Proclamation

Christians commonly feel two temptations after reading a passage like 1 John 2:12–17. The first is *isolation*. Some might take John to mean we should disentangle ourselves from every aspect of living in the world's system (buying, selling, culture, government, and so forth).

On the other hand, some might take John to mean we should fix the world—correct every wrong, spotlight every ill deed, and show our displeasure over every sin. We might call this temptation, *over-assertion*.

Chuck gives two guiding correctives to these temptations:

- 1) *Insulate, don't isolate*. Christians live disciplined lives, full of conviction and supernatural contentment. We neither isolate nor embrace. We live in, not of, the world.
- 2) *Proclaim, don't assert*. Christians share the gospel with a magnetic kindness that displays dignity and charity, not condescension. We open our mouths at the right time.



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Which of the two guiding correctives do you most need growth in? Why? More specifically, in which area of life? How would that area of life look differently as you grow?

Peter captures the life balance we want as Christians living in a depraved world:

Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. (1 Peter 3:15–16)



A FINAL PRAYER

As we end our study of John's warning not to love the world, take a few minutes to draw near to the Lord in fellowship with Him through prayer. Express your dependence on Him and reaffirm your love for Him over anything this world offers. Thank God for His Word. And ask Him to help you resist the enticement of the world and keep your eyes on Him alone.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, *grab a copy* at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 54.

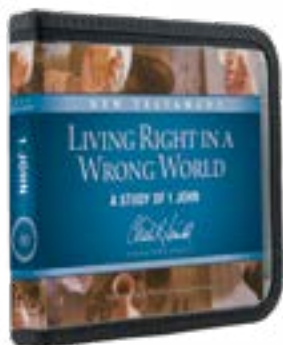


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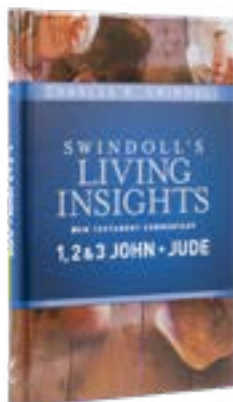
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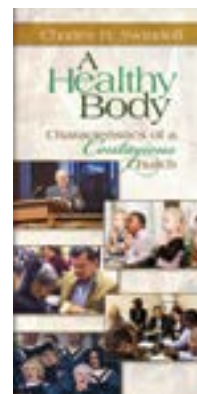
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

