

What Do We Love?

How we behave is a function of how we think. And how we think is a function of what we love in the deepest recesses of our heart. Real improvement begins there.

*“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be **lovers of themselves, lovers of money**, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, **lovers of pleasure** rather than **lovers of God** . . .” (2 Tim. 3:1-4).*

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21).



Paul’s warning of “perilous times” paints a dark picture of a culture tyrannized by anti-social behavior. The cause of this social disintegration is identified in a formula that Paul uses four times, describing people as “lovers of” something. Three of these phrases point to sinister motives: “lovers of themselves,” “lovers of money,” and “lovers of pleasure.” The final phrase, “lovers of God,” highlights the antidote to these destructive attitudes. Studied together, these four attributes tell us everything we need to know about the collapse of social norms—and how to restore them.

Who we are as individuals is determined not so much by *what we do* as by *what we love*. In the words of Jesus, it is a function of what we treasure, what we hold to be of greatest value. Identify

what you prize above all else, and *that* will be what you live for. All your decisions will flow from that source.

Paul points to three perverse loves that can corrupt our lives. The first, *love of self*, is foundational to the other two. Self-lovers are, by definition, selfish. Their actions, their relationships, and their interests all turn on one consideration: *How does this benefit me?* If others are harmed in the pursuit of their agendas, well, that’s their tough luck. I want what I want!

The second unhealthy love is the *love of money*. Money is simply an instrument of economic exchange; it is not intrinsically evil. But when money becomes the primary object of our affection, it takes on the role of a god for whom we will sacrifice everything else. The pursuit of material wealth blinds people to more noble aspirations in their lives, drawing them deeper into a life of greed and avarice.

The third corrupting love is *love of pleasure*. These are people who live to have their senses excited. Their only purpose in life is to be amused, thrilled, titillated, gratified. With careless abandon they chase after sex, music, feasting, laughter, games, sports, adventure, mind-altering substances, or whatever other physical delight is dangled before them. Pleasure is legitimate, but in the absence of boundaries it becomes an all-consuming idol.

As these passions come to dominate greater numbers of people, the lofty ideals that inspire humans to achieve dignity are gradually displaced by more selfish behaviors: arrogance, treachery, ingratitude, brutality, familial breakdown. The effects on society are devastating, as we are witnessing in our own culture. Perilous times are indeed upon us . . . and now we know why.

So, what triggers this collapse of personal integrity? And what can be done to restore what we have lost? Paul concludes his description with the fourth love, the one that makes all the difference: *love of God*. The other loves take over when God is shoved aside. But when people recognize God’s hand in their lives, they will see themselves no longer as self-centered consumers but as instruments of sacrifice and service to others. That love for God will radiate goodness outward into society, transforming everything it touches.

What does your life show that *YOU* love?

— David King