



Three Habits of Highly Destructive People: Power (1 John 2:15-17)

Do you desire control apart from God? Worldly power is the desire for more control than we were designed by God to have. The Apostle John called it the lust of the eyes, the second of three habits of highly destructive people: “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves 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 boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15-17 NASB).

There might not have been another human being who lusted for power more than King Herod the Great, Tetrarch of Judea, who ruled 2,000 years ago when God came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ. Known for his great building programs, Herod built his first of a series of palace fortresses three miles southeast of Bethlehem. They were designed to give him safe asylum in case he were forced to flee the country to his homeland of Idumea. His largest fortress was the Herodian, 45 acres of building on 200 acres of land, making it the third largest architectural find in the ancient world. The palace featured four towers, with the highest stretching 120’ into the air, sprawling 55’ in diameter.

Yet, when Jesus Christ came to earth, He did not choose this physically impressive location. Instead, within eyesight of this ancient wonder, God came to earth in a feeding trough. Why? The answer is in the eyes. Herod gazed to satisfy himself. He saw power in the love of the world’s fortresses and locked doors, keeping others out. However, Jesus sought others to find the love of the Father in them. He saw power in love, permitting all who were willing to enter. Jesus taught that the eyes comprise the lens of the human heart (Matthew 6:22).

The eyes have power. Where are your eyes focused?

In this contrast of portraits, which had to fill the Apostle John’s mind, we see two kinds of power: one of the world, one of the Father; one dark, one light; one temporary, one eternal; one that dies, and one that lives. John revealed: “But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walls in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:11 NASB). Consequently, each of us needs to ask, “Am I locked in the darkness of the world’s power, misusing and abusing control, or am I living in the light of the the Father’s power?”

Solomon taught that the eyes are never satisfied (Proverbs 27:20). We desire one more deal, one more illicit relationship, one more achievement, one more title, one more company. Consequently, whether at work, home, in the community, or even at church, we power up on others to achieve more. We power up physically, claiming, “I’m stronger than you.” We power up mentally, saying, “I’m smarter than you.” We power up socially, thinking, “I’m more popular than you.” We power up financially, calculating, “I’m richer than you.” We power up spiritually, noting, “I’m more religious than you.” We even attempt to power up on God by attempting to control our own lives. We power up, in part, from fear of losing control.

Herod the Great was proud, powering up on his subjects, fearing that he would lose control. He was known as the “King of the Jews,” a title he received from the Roman Senate (37-4 BC) —one which the Jews would not recognize because of its origin. He exercised his reign with this in mind, unwilling to yield his power.

Herod the Great was harsh. He killed his favorite of ten wives, as well three of his sons. He decreed to kill boys age two and younger when the Magi didn’t return with the location of Jesus (Matthew 2:16). He lived to satisfy himself. Herod exerted his power over people because he desired to reveal his character and presence rather than God’s.

While few of us ever kill anyone, we are quite capable of being proud, harsh, and controlling of others when we desire to reveal our own character and presence over God’s. When we exert worldly power over those around us, the result is that they die a little inside. Truth be known, so do we.

The real King of the Jews offered an alternative to the lock of pride and its resulting harshness. He was humble and gentle (Matthew 11:29). He was a liberator who authoritatively freed people, healed them, and gave them life, complete with access to a different kind of power. He courageously searched out others, moving toward them in relationship to uncover the love of the Father in them. His Spirit calls us to a life of the same.

Jesus searched to humbly unlock and gently restore the spiritual inner beings of everyone. He spent 90 percent of His life in Nazareth, a city nestled on ten acres with open sewers running in the streets. Archeological evidence reveals that Nazareth had no paved roads, no gold, no silver, and no metal bowls. Families lived in dirt-floor homes constructed with dung mortar and survived on diets deficient of iron and protein. The infant mortality rate was 50 percent.

Jesus and His father Joseph were most likely stonemasons. It is reasonable to surmise that they might have worked to construct a stone amphitheater in Sephona known as the “Ornament of Galilee,” only three to four miles away from Herod’s grand structures. So He knew about Herod’s hard heart; He had seen the edifices that Herod had erected in his own honor. However, Jesus chose a different path. In His humility, Jesus saw the power in love, exalting the humble and granting them access to His kingdom. His heart of love changed the world through the transcendent power of God.

We can experience the power of Christ when we surrender our lust of the eyes to Him. Jesus told Paul that His power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). When we are weak in our lust for control apart from God, we are strong in the power of Christ (2 Corinthians 12:10). Surrendering to Him allows us to walk in His light. Jesus taught: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

In the end, Herod died in his palace in Jericho in 4 BC. He died out of control. Historians say that he passed away most likely due to a bout with syphilis. To ensure that mourning, rather than rejoicing, would take place at his death, he issued a decree that several prominent Jews be executed at his passing. His sister Salome reversed this edict.

Contrastingly, Jesus died in control, satisfied in the Father’s power. The Gospel writers demonstrated how Jesus’ desires were satisfied in the Father, even in His darkest hours, evidenced in His final words on the cross—the most excruciating death devised by mankind. Jesus did not breathe his last breath until he had finished His purpose, a mark of control discovered in the power of the Father to fulfill prophecy: “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). “It is finished” was the same term written at the top of a Bill of Sale that was marked, “Paid in Full.” Jesus Christ, the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), has paid in full for the price of our sin, including the lust of the eyes, the desire for control apart from God in the form of worldly power. In Christ, we freely receive the love of the Father and pursue His will for our lives.

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

Are you locked in darkness, pursuing worldly power apart from God, fearful of losing control of your life? Are you dying inside with every choice that takes you a step further from Him? Are you willing to change your perspective and surrender to the Holy Spirit who will bring you to the light of Christ? If so, pray to God, “I can’t. You can.” “I can’t” is repentance. “You can” is faith. Repentance means that you see things differently. When you see your sin as God sees it, you agree with Him that you can’t pay for the penalty of sin, but in Christ, He can. Christ becomes your Savior. When you see that you can’t free yourself from the power of sin, but in Christ, God can, Christ becomes your Lord. In eternity, He will free you from the presence of sin, including any inkling of the lust of the eyes.