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We are in the middle of John's first letter to Christians who were hassled and harassed by the Christian community, with distorted, prejudiced and inaccurate understanding of the Word of God, as well as equally serious torment from outside the Christian community.

A light reading of John's letter might leave us feeling bored with what seems to be repetitious words and phrases, but a more serious reading reveals a very structured message.

In the final years of his life, John's overriding concern is to caution his readers, the values championed by the world in which we live, has incited people to disregard, disobey, and at times challenge the law of God, and the antichrists who teach a way of life leading to *law-less-ness*.

Every age of human history has a popular culture which contributes to the development of society, but there is also a strong current working against it. I have said this before, music of every age contributes to the values of society.

One only has to read the lyrics in the Beatles song book to realise the extent to which, in the 1960s and 1970s, they shaped society.

I was driving recently, and for a change for the serious topics of Radio 4, I was listening to Simon Mayo on Radio 2 when I heard these words sung:

I'm in heaven, but my feet are still on the ground, and I'm afraid I'm never coming down. Its got me, O! Its got me, just like Jonah's whale has swallowed me whole!

I think I know what he was singing about, but the thought crossed my mind, this chap has no clue what it is like to be swallowed by a large fish, and remain there for three days. I would have died of an aortic aneurism or cardiac arrest within minutes of being swallowed by a large fish no matter how warm and comfortable it was in there!

Then I heard these words sung:

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Being with you is meaningless.

Baby, You are my favourite waste of time !

I won't tell you what the other words were, but what a way to dump someone. I was shocked at the words used used to break up a relationship and when the shock of the moment faded, I remembered a 78 rpm record my father brought back with him from America in 1948, in which the crooner sang to a jive-swing rhythm, *I don't want her, you can have her, she's too fat for me!*

I guess I was brought up in the waning shadow of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Mr D'arcy expresses his love for Elisabeth, *"My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."* Then something happens and he bombs spectacularly with the words, *I love you—even though it goes against my will, against my reason, against my character, and against my upbringing!* And of course the beautiful Elisabeth says she is offended and insulted; *you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character.*

Popular culture, music in particular, has a subtle influence over how we think, and how that thought translates into attitude and behaviour.

We can see this in what we celebrate today. It started out with "Mothering Sunday" which had to do with returning to the mother Church, which was of cultural significance at its time. Then it became **Mother's Day** which, in the **me** culture of our society, changed to the celebration to **me** as mother, and by doing this, it excluded men. But the intention at the start was to create space and time in our busy diaries, to do what God wanted of us, **Honour your father and mother, that your days may be long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.**

This is the only one of the 10 commandments which has a condition attached to it - act, live a lifestyle which honours your father and mother;

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this is a blessing to you: you will have long life and enjoy God's blessing in the land in which you live.

John is concerned with the way the world introduces subtle shifts in meaning, which in turn changes our understanding and our practice.

He takes us back to the first sin recorded in the broken world (the first sin committed by human beings was in God's perfect world, the Garden of God). Cain was the firstborn of the first man and woman (Adam and Eve). We don't know anything about his upbringing, but we know he followed his father's occupation of farming the land. When Cain's parents broke their faith in God, God said to Adam, he would *struggle to scratch a living from the land. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat.*¹ Gone was the garden which produced plentiful fruits by the generosity of God. Cain would have grown up listening to his father's lament, that by trading Truth for a lie, he traded God's comfort for hard graft; *by the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat.*

And guess who would have stoked contempt for his father and his occupation? The master deceiver himself, satan.

Such was Cain's displeasure, God who knows what is in our hearts, warned Cain, *sin is crouching at your door, eager to control you. **But you must subdue it and be its master.***²

In this broken world, sin is always crouching at the door eager to control us. There is much wisdom in the old saying, *There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.* It is for us to steer clear of *sin's desire to control us, and be master over it.* It is for us to make every effort to avoid the *slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.*

¹ Genesis 3:17-19

² Genesis 4:7

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John's advice to steer clear of *sin's desire to control us, and be master over it*, is captured in one word: **love**. He explains,

*Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.*³

It is remarkable when you consider it, this word '**love**' is found fifty times, in the five short chapters of John's first letter.

There are many expressions of the word we know simply as **love**. The New Testament written in Greek, has five words for the different kinds of love: **Agape**: the love of God. **Storge**: the love of a parent to a child. **Phileo**: the love of a friendship/brother. **Koinonia**: love of neighbour. **Eros**: erotic love.⁴

Our popular culture has shunted the first four in favour of the last expression of the word love, **eros**: erotic love, which is practiced as a self-centred love. But consider this, *There is no greater love than this—that a man should lay down His life for His friends.*⁵ Jesus said this to His disciples during a discourse just before His death by crucifixion.

It is time we made this day, what it should be, a celebration of the life of our mothers. Mother's Day is not just for women, its for men too. All of us are here because we had a mother.

As each of us thinks back on our mothers' life, and give thanks to God for her life, we realise she was not perfect, she was not faultless, she had her days, but she was **our mother**. If she were here, we might hear her voice echo John's advice, *Little children, I did my best not to love only with words, or just talk about love; I did what I thought was right, and I did it believing it to be true.*

³ 1 John 3:18

⁴ from one of Ravi Zacharias' talks/sermons

⁵ John 15:13

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If you don't know the rap group, the Black Eyed Peas, as your grandchildren. In 2003, their song, "**Where is the Love?**" was a number-one hit around the world. The song was a lament, a long, moral complaint against the society in which we live. Yet sadly, it did not offer anything beyond its tone of complaint, therefore, never gave an answer to the question it asks.

In the middle of the song is a line which champions the point John makes.

If you never know truth then you never know love.

As we celebrate the life of our mothers today, lets remind ourselves, our mother's may not have been perfect, but then none of us are; our mothers may not have done all we expected of them, but then neither did we always do what they expected of us; our mothers may not have been present when we needed them, but then honestly, were we there for them whenever and wherever they needed us?

Our mother's may never have said the words, *I love you*, but then we may have never said these words to them!

All God asks of us is to put time aside and do what we can to, **Honour our father and mother, that our days may be long in the land the Lord our God has given us.**

AMEN.