

## Know Your Enemy: The Battle, Ephesians 6:10-13, 4/24/22

[Blank Slide] On Friday night we celebrated Nathan's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, and he loves sushi, so we went to Mikimotos and all the sushi comes out on a wood boat, pretty nice touch. Delicious food, lots of fun and laughter, it was a beautiful night so afterward took a couple of lefts into Brandywine Park right by the zoo as the sun was going down, and then made our last stop at Ritas for Italian water ice. Everyone was in a good mood, enjoying each other, a great evening. Just a little slice of peace, harmony, all is right with the world. And yet, as wonderful as all of that is. These moments do not tell the full story of reality in the world or in the Keeler house. Our newsfeeds reveal another aspect of our world- the world of struggle [Read some live headlines from app]. And it's not just the struggle out there, in the relationships around us. Our Friday night could have just as easily ended poorly if they got our order at Rita's wrong. Fighting and hurt feelings and everyone going to their own rooms. Marital strife, mental health, physical ailments...and on top of all that we know that there is a struggle in us. Competing desires and thoughts that are in conflict. For some of us many days feel like a struggle just to stay faithful and to keep following Jesus. Why is that? How is it that we can have moments of beauty and harmony followed by moments of pain. How is it that we can be Christians, know the love of God and his goodness, have the Holy Spirit and the hope of His return...and yet, feel like life is a constant battle? Here's a theory ...maybe it's because it is. In one of the last teachings of Jesus in preparing his disciples he said **John 16:33 *In this life you will have troubles.*** That word can also be translated: Tribulation, extreme pressure from the enemy and opposition, persecution. And Jesus said repeatedly that if he faced troubles we should expect to face troubles as well. **1 Peter 4:12 says, *Do not be surprised by this fiery ordeal...as though something strange were happening to you.***

Now for some of us this is a massive paradigm shift. Some of us live either in ignorance, avoidance or denial of this battle. We may be religious, spiritual, even Christian but essentially we think of life as a pursuit of the good life according to the cultural story passed down to us. Success, wealth, health, happy feelings, security and comfort. With little to no spiritual urgency, no vigilance or awareness of a spiritual battle. We think prayer is mainly for God to give us things to make our life easier and more comforting. We think church is mainly to feel good about ourselves, get our felt needs met, a social club or get some free children's activities. But what happens when you face trials, when life begins to squeeze in on you, when you realize your marriage isn't as healthy as you hoped, you aren't as happy as you expected to be, or death, disease or addiction shows up in your life? Many are then shocked and disillusioned with God. He must be punishing us, or can't possibly be good or care. We wrongly assume that normal life is blissful and peaceful, and only occasionally and rarely a battle and then are tossed around like a child in a wave when reality hits us.

But our spiritual ancestors didn't share our resistance to think of life primarily as a struggle and a battle. Jesus gave battle analogy in **Mark 3:23-27** to show that he is the one who wars against the strong man, Satan, to plunder his kingdom. Apostle Paul **2 Corinthians 10:4 *The weapons that we fight with are not the weapons of the world.*** At the end of his life he says **2 Timothy 4:7 *I have found the good fight.***

Others of us know we are in a battle but we are targeting the wrong enemy. Probably the most comprehensive battle imagery comes from Paul's letter of Ephesians 6. <sup>10</sup> *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.* <sup>11</sup> *Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*

<sup>12</sup> *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

Here Paul tells us not only that the struggle is real, but locates the realm of the struggle not in flesh and blood. It is not being fought with F-16s, T-72 tanks. Nor is it primarily a battle democrats and republicans. It's not against people at all. When we wrongly think our enemy is the government, or big pharma, or oil companies, or China, or the green party, or the LGBT+ community, when these things become our primary targets, we inevitably turn to hate and hostility and demonization of people. Which plays right into the real enemy's strategy. We are called to love and light. As much of an existential threat as those issues appear to be (and I'm not minimizing those important issues at all), Paul tells us, as do the other writers of Scripture that the heart of the battle is located in the spiritual realm: the realm of principalities, powers, creatures that are literally hell-bent on the destruction of God's creation and his good rule and reign. The deepest reality is a battle for your mind, body and soul. Or to put it another way, every single one of us is either taking enemy territory and being formed into the image of Christ or losing territory and being deformed by our spiritual enemy.

Our goal for each of you is to become a resilient disciple of Jesus in our increasingly post-Christian world. If we are going to "stand firm" and "fight the good fight" and "resist the enemy" and "overcome" and "have peace for our souls" all commands by the writers of the New Testament and Jesus himself, then like Sun Tzu famously wrote in The Art of War, you must **Know Your Enemy**. Christians for centuries have used a helpful and thoroughly biblical paradigm to name the **three-headed enemy that we face: The Devil, The Flesh, The World**. And that is what this 4-week series is all about.

I was inspired to preach this series after reading **Live No Lies by John Mark Comer** while on the airplane to the Holy Land in October last year. What I appreciate about how Comer approaches this vital topic is that he takes an ancient paradigm used by Christians throughout the centuries and keenly applies it to our increasingly post-Christian context in the West, what was coined by Mark Matlock and David Kinnaman of Barna research, "Digital Babylon." **[Faith for Exiles Slide]** Don't forget you have the opportunity to come here him speak about that on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. But **Comer's book** is so insightful and timely, so I'm unapologetically going to borrow some of his language and ideas throughout this series. It is also a series he made into a four-part small group series, which I would encourage you to go through.

**[Title Slide]** What does it mean that the battle is in the spiritual realm? When tend to think of overtly "demonic"- tarot cards, seances...yes those...but What Comer and I are going to argue is

that the primary intersection between spiritual world and humanity is in the realm of our minds. The spiritual battle is best understood as a battle between truth and lies, between the reality of God and the deception of the Enemy. **The three-headed enemy's strategy is this: Deceptive Ideas sown by the Devil that target our disordered desires of the Flesh, which are accepted and celebrated in our broken World.** Let's break this down just a little more and give an overview of each of these, which will set up the next three weeks.

The Devil. Let's read Jesus' words in John 8, where we see some of Jesus' most vivid descriptions of this powerful creature. Some context, Jesus is in a debate with the Pharisees about Jesus' identity as the Son of God and why he came. Jesus famously says, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. The Pharisees reject Jesus' truth about his origin and claims. In response Jesus has strong words for the Pharisees. He says this, ***44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.***

***When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!***

Did you catch that? Out of all the things he could say about the Devil what he focuses most on is deception. Certainly he has only methods- illness, violence, supernatural demonic displays...The 80s Rock Band KISS. But at his core he is the father of lies Jesus said that the original of all deception is the Devil. It is his native tongue, his expertise, his M.O. and it was since the beginning. He operates in the realm of deceptive ideas.

**[Enemy's Strategy Slide]** This leads to the second strategy- the Devil whispers deceptive ideas that target our disordered desires of the flesh. Said a different way, he targets our unfulfilled longings, our unique weaknesses from our past and family of origin, our proclivities, the places where fear and shame dwell. John Mark Comer says it like this, **"His lies aren't random: 'Elvis is alive and hiding in Mexico.' No, they play to some deep fissure in the human heart that is bent in the wrong direction."** Or in the language of Tim Keller: Idols of the heart. The heart's tendency to take a good thing and make it an ultimate thing.

**[Enemy's Strategy Slide]** Many deceptive ideas are tailor-made for our cultural moment and for you individually. The Devil studies you and is an expert on you. He knows your Enneagram number, he knows you are an ENTJ, extrovert or introvert, draw to self-isolation or to the crowd, optimist or pessimist, he knows your dark side, your patterns. He also knows your past and the things said to you or done to you that you believed about yourself. He knows your coping and soothing mechanisms and what you try to hide from everyone else. And he knows what amount of truth to mix with the lie to get you to believe it. Let me give you an example from my life. Over the years I have seen the pattern of a deceptive idea that I am prone toward that gets packaged and repackaged to me over the years. "You work hard for God and all his people. You deserve..." **What deceptions does he whisper to you?** "My spouse doesn't really understand me, we aren't the people we once were and we've grown apart. There is someone else that would be a better fit and make me happier. God would want me to be happy." Or

“People are going to let me down, I really don’t need to be part of a church and they probably won’t miss me anyway. I can do this better on my own.” Or as we age we tend to fall into this deception: “Everything is changing so fast and I don’t like it. The way we’ve always done it is best. Anyone who tries to take this away from me is my enemy.”

**[Enemy’s Strategy Slide]** So we have deceptive ideas sown by the Devil, that target the disordered desires of our flesh, that are then accepted and celebrated in our broken world. John Mark Comer and I are the same age and so we can both relate to cultural phenomenon that took place in the early years of the digital age called “Napster” which he talks about in his book. Long before Spotify and Apple Music, was Napster. You would download Napster onto your computer and have access to thousands and thousands of songs for free, of course the problem was that it cut out the artists and the record label from getting paid. It was piracy plain and simple, the ethics are clear. And yet almost everyone I knew whether church kids or my friends from school moved the moral line to make music piracy socially acceptable, I would even download and burn Christian CDs. What hypocrisy! And any time someone would say that was wrong, I would roll my eyes and think to myself, “What’s the big deal? These rockstars are millionaires, I’m a poor student. And if anyone is in the wrong it’s Napster not me.” Now, I think every 40 something would admit, it was wrong and we all knew it deep down, but we were deceived by an idea, that played to our disordered desires, and collectively was normalized, accepted (even celebrated) in our world, or at least in our subculture in the early 2000s. This is a pretty non-controversial example of what Jesus and the writers of the New Testament called the world.

We will get into this more in week 4 of this series but when the Bible uses the world in this context it isn’t talking about the people (God so loved the world) or even the planet and ecosystem. God loves you and your dog and even your cat and guineapig. It’s talking about **the system of practices and standards that are set up in opposition to God.** And so this world system, in our context we might call it modern secularism is not just agnostic to God but in many ways anti-God, set up as counter to God’s values and virtues and means of thriving. Jesus said, **John 15:18 Don’t be surprised if the world hates you for it first hated me.** The Gospel writer John in **1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world.** And throughout history we see the normalizing, accepting, embracing of anti-God deceptions, maybe the most obvious of them being slavery which was widely normalized in society for hundreds of years. Now we look back with contempt (and rightly so) and think what was wrong with those people? How could they possibly think that was OK? It is so obvious.

And yet, are we so arrogant and myopic to think that there aren’t obvious socially acceptable, normalized and celebrated deceptions that are part of the very water in which we swim today? Do we think that 50-100 years people aren’t going to look back at things we normalize with contempt and say, “What was wrong with those people?” “How could they think that was OK?” That will be the subject of the final message in this series.

**Title Slide** The struggle is real, the battle is present-tense, and you are in it right now. If you don’t know that you are, you are most vulnerable. We are all being formed into something. If

we are going to stand firm as resilient disciples we must know the three-headed enemy: The Devil, The Flesh and The World. My hope is to increase the frequency in which we are tuned in to the strategies of the enemy so that we can begin to counter the story of the deception with the liberating, powerful truth of God and specifically the gospel in our lives. Jesus said not only that we will have troubles, but take heart, I have overcome the world. At the cross he absorbed the three-headed enemy and defeated it. Shows himself as the way, the truth and the life. So here is how I want to close- what is one deceptive idea that maybe the Holy Spirit is has been revealing to you throughout this message?