

Know Your Enemy: The Flesh, 5/8/22, Galatians 5

Mother's Day Prayer.

Recap: Life is a struggle, not just to get up in the morning, at its core it is a battle in the spiritual realm for your mind. How many of you have been more aware of the spiritual struggle over these last two weeks? We are learning to fight the good fight of faith. It is critical therefore to know our Enemy. We are looking at the biblical paradigm of a three-headed enemy: **The Devil, The Flesh, The World**. Utilizing the book- *Live No Lies* by John Mark Comer. **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.**

. **"The heart wants what it wants."** Some of you know that as a pop song lyric. But do you know it's origin story? I didn't either, Comer shares that it came from an interview in 1993 with the then 60 year old Woody Allen. In attempting to justify his affair with his college age surrogate daughter, Soon-Yi, Woody Allen said, "The heart wants what it wants." Now 30 years later, this mantra encapsulates the value system of our modern culture. A self-perpetuating justification for almost anything from an affair to hook-up culture to a late-night run to McDonalds. What Woody Allen and our culture call the heart is much closer to what the Apostle Paul called the flesh. **Galatians 5 ¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.**

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. In Galatia, the church was struggling with at least two problems- one was theological- some of the members were attempting to add to the gospel. Instead of the gospel- Jesus + Nothing, they were adding Jewish laws- legalistic brand of Christianity. But the other problem was relational. They were v.15 biting and devouring one another, separating themselves "denominationalizing." Legalism and Tribalism are two challenges the church faces today. Notice that Paul says the same enemy is behind the church today.

What is the flesh? **Comer: "The lower tier, animalistic cravings of our body apart from God. It's our primal instinct for self-gratification."** Eugene Peterson- **"The corruption that sin introduced into our very appetites and instincts."**

Here in Galatians 5 Paul is giving the church a wake up call about the dangers of the enemy of the flesh. And so we want to learn at least **4 Truths to Wake up to about the flesh**
Wide-Ranging: Let's take a look at an array of flesh instincts. **Galatians 5: 19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.** Over our lifetime from our personalities, experiences, hereditary DNA and family history and worldviews our flesh gets custom fitted just for us like a suit. That's why this list hits everyone a little differently. The flesh is your impulse to watch porn, to drink too much, to buy those shoes you don't need, flip the bird to the guy who cut you off...typically what we think of...but notice what shows up in the middle, "selfish ambition" - the need to be right all the time, to be successful ahead of others, to draw attention. Selfishness

shows up in the same list as witchcraft and orgies. That's important to remember for the legalists, we feed the flesh both through legalism and rebellion. It is easy to look through that list and judge other people...but the flesh is being indulged just as much in the need to win an online argument or the need to be validated by others for how much you serve other people, as it is getting high. This list should sober us, not cause us to judge others.

Identity-Forming: The more we feed our flesh, the more certain desires begin to define us. And our flesh feels so natural to us so much so that it's easy to say, "That's me. Just who I am. I'm dark and brooding, I'm the party girl, or I'm fiery, I'm Irish that's just how we are. I'm defined by my sexual desires or how I feel in my body." And this desire to define ourselves by our flesh (our heart) is celebrated/demanded in the cultural air we breathe.

Let me take a brief segue to help us understand how we got here. By far, the most influential person who shaped the modern view of the heart was psychologist **Sigmund Freud**. Before Freud, there were agreed upon categories of desires- higher and lower. And living well was saying "yes" to the higher desires for virtue, self-discipline, sacrifice and "no" to the lower desires more appetite kind of desires (what the Bible calls the flesh). And you would navigate this based on the moral codes handed down to you, in Judeo-Christian cultures that was God's Word. Freud's take was radically contrary. For him the most important desire was **our libido, which is defined as our core, authentic desires** not just for sex but for pleasure and fulfillment as a whole. But because libido without restraint would lead to anarchy, authorities like society, our parents, religion told us that we must repress these desires. This he said, **our libido is our truest self. And for Freud (and this is key) repression of desire is the basis for all neurosis.** Translation: "The reason you're unhappy is because religion, society, your parents aren't letting you follow your heart." Now even though his theory has been debunked scientifically, that deceptive idea has slipped into the modern consciousness. His fingerprints are on all the modern slogans: follow your heart, you do you, just do it, speak your truth, be true to yourself. Don't let anyone tell you what you can and cannot do. Who I am is my sexual or gender preference. The ultimate sin in our culture is to not follow your heart, or worse to prevent someone else from following their heart. The late Baylor Professor of Philosophy and Ethics **Robert C. Roberts** "We have been led to feel that the self is sacrosanct: just as in an earlier time it was thought never fitting to deny God, so now it seems never right to deny oneself." So the flesh is like a tailor-made suit, today worn proudly and celebrated as our very identity. Christianity says, your desires, even at times when they are very strong aren't our deepest desires. They don't define who I am. 1 Corinthians 6:11 Paul goes through a similar list of the flesh. **And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.** I used to be defined by my lust, attention seeking and impulsiveness...that's not who I am anymore. I'm defined by Jesus.

Enemy-Targeted: Paul doesn't explicitly say the Devil is influencing our flesh, it's implied here but he says so explicitly in a partner letter to the twin city of Ephesus. **Ephesians 2:1-3 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you**

followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

³ *All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts.* You see the three-headed enemy all in one place. Remember how the Devil works: primarily through deceptive ideas. Not so much deceptive ideas like the Earth is flat or aliens are living among us although that might be the case for a few on the fringes...but highly curated deceptions that play right into your tailor-made flesh. [#3 Enemy-Targeted Slide] I was part of a DE Leadership program a few years ago and one of our guest speakers was with this super (possibly evil) genius guy who invented an algorithm that is now used across many online marketing platforms. Have you ever had the experience where you are talking about a product or a problem and then suddenly you are getting ads for it? That might be him. With almost pinpoint accuracy market products that you want or didn't even know you needed. That's the Devil, except he could teach a masterclass on it- essentially the book *Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis. The devil is playing some of us like a fiddle and we don't even know it. If he can get you to justify your seething anger at people on the other side of political issues, or if he can get you to believe in the reasons you can't get along with other Christians...he's playing to your self-righteous flesh. If he can get you to believe you are ugly, worthless, unlovable in a way that plays to your self-loathing flesh...he's got you. That is why it is so important to recognize the deception of the enemy and know who you are in Christ.

Life-Enslaving: Galatians 5:1 *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

¹⁷ *For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.* Notice how different Paul's understanding of freedom is from most Americans. Most Americans think *freedom is the right to do whatever you want*. Encapsulated in the secular philosopher Princess Elsa: No right, no wrong, no rules for me, I'm free! Now of course, the caveat everyone would be quick to add is "*...as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else.*" But do we have an agreed upon standard of what hurt someone else means. Probably the most obvious example of this is the abortion debate, which couldn't be more of a hot button issue right now because of the potential overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. Abortion advocates would argue, "A woman should be allowed to do whatever she wants with her body, it isn't hurting anyone else, so men and the government should leave their hands off their bodies." Except, who gets the right to define "hurt anyone else?" What about the life inside her body? Does that life, which has no ability to express their voice, get a say in whether this "hurts them?" Is this true freedom? Everyone do whatever they want? You do you? Not according to Paul.

For Paul, there are two aspects of freedom. *There is freedom from and freedom for...or what Comer calls Negative and positive freedom.* In Galatians, Paul is saying we have freedom from the rigid constraints of the Mosaic Law because Christ set them free. We may say America was established in order to experience freedom from tyranny. Or today we might encourage the right to freedom from unfair laws. But there is also freedom to that Paul points to, a positive

freedom. ¹³ *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.*

¹⁴ *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Freedom to: Paul says, don't use your freedom to serve your flesh. Use your freedom to love and serve one another. True freedom calls us to unselfish love not the selfishness of demanding our own desires.

But it goes further, true freedom for Paul and the writers of the New Testament is **the freedom from the tyranny of the flesh to seek and demand its own desires and freedom to walk by the Spirit in love.** Positive freedom means that we get a new power to overcome our self-gratifying desires and we get new desires for deep, self-giving love- what Paul calls, walking by the Spirit. More on that in a moment. Anything that has control over you whether that's money, power, sex, anger, a self-defeating behavior, even your phone is your true master. What the world calls slavery (living within certain sexual boundaries, guarding our speech and not getting drunk, fasting and dedicated prayer) we call freedom. And what the world calls freedom we call slavery.

Slavery to our flesh will as Paul says v.15 will destroy us and cause us to devour one another and in cautionary words he says verse ²¹- *I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.* Or just a paragraph later **Galatians 6:7-8** *Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked, a man reaps what he sows.*

Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Sow a thought, reap an action, sow an action, sow some actions, reap habit, so a habit, reap a character, sow character, reap a destiny, either in slavery to the flesh or freedom in the spirit. An affair doesn't happen suddenly to a happily married couple, but through a 1000 thoughts and actions sown according to the flesh. How does a bitter old man or woman happen? Through a 1000 everyday decisions we make to complain, criticize, play the victim, focus on the negative and so on we become more and more the kind of person who is by nature negative, grouchy, unhappy, and unpleasant to be around, until eventually we lose the very capacity to live happily, gratefully, and full of wonder at our lives in God's good world.

Summarize: The flesh is Wide-Ranging, Identity-Forming, Enemy-Targeted and Life-Enslaving.

The Flesh is a great enemy to the good life that God intends- a life of true freedom and fruitfulness and meaning. So how about a little good news. **If we are in Jesus Christ, we are no longer slaves to our flesh. We do not have to obey its desires. Those desires of the don't define you, they aren't your deepest desires and you can experience increasing victory over the flesh.** How? Well just a brief word on this, because we are going to go into 3-part series called Abide in a few weeks that we address that. But look what Paul says.

¹⁶ *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* The secret to defeating the flesh is to walk by the Spirit. When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we are given

the Holy Spirit whose primary role is to empower us to live the good life God intended characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. ²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.* The radical opposite of the flesh. The Holy Spirit also helps us have the power to defeat the flesh. ²⁴ *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* Coming to Jesus in faith includes repentance from our old way of thinking and our slavery to the flesh, nailing it to the cross with Jesus. That doesn't mean we stop being tempted. But it means that we have the power over it through the Spirit. You don't manage the flesh- you launch a militant campaign to kill it. Now, this doesn't happen overnight. We don't just wake up one day and our battles with the flesh are suddenly easy victories and have forbearance and kindness and love for others. It's a walk with the Spirit, a long walk- that requires us to "keep in step with the Spirit." And the primary way we do that is through the disciplines of abiding with Christ.

Let's circle back to the line the heart wants what it wants. [Title Slide] There's certainly truth in that statement. But what this statement completely misses is that there are deeper desires of our new heart given to us in Christ. And while we can't necessarily control all our desires, we can influence them and come to the point where they no longer control us. My old self, my flesh wants to crawl back off that cross and dig itself out of the grave every day. And every day I must choose to walk by the Spirit.

Give you the opportunity to repent.