

Know Your Enemy: The World, 1 John 2:15-17, 5/22/22

Our goal for you is to become resilient disciples of Jesus. Life is a battle. And our enemy is not our spouse, not a political party, or the person on the other side of the twitter war...it's not the person at the 10 items or less checkout who clearly has 30 or more items...as frustrating as that may be when you are in a hurry. The apostle Paul in Ephesians 6 says the battle is not in flesh and blood but that its core, spiritual. And it's not just a battle out there, but it is primarily in here...the battlefield is fought in our minds and hearts over truth and lies, between the reality of God and the deception of the Enemy. Lies about God, about ourselves, about others.

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 World: What is it? How does it work? What do we do about it?

1 John 2:15 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.*

And decades before John's strong warning against loving the world, he heard Jesus give similar warnings. John 15 ¹⁸ *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own.*

As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

This is the Greek word "Cosmos" which has multiple meanings- it can simply mean planet Earth, or people- as in "God so loved the world." Clearly this isn't what Jesus or John means. John Mark Comer: "The world is a system of ideas, values, practices and norms that are institutionalized in a culture organized around the twin sins of rebellion against God and the redefinition of good and evil." We might on one hand just say that the world is The Flesh multiplied by 600 Million people in our country, or 7 Billion people on the planet.... and that's partly true. But it's not just about numbers of people, it's what happens when influential people in a culture find agreement around deceptive ideas and then normalize that rebellion against God and redefinition of good and evil. One example of this is the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. The people of the Land of Shinar come together and the influential come up with an idea that becomes the rallying cry of the people: to build a city and a tower that reaches the heavens, why to: make a name for ourselves (rebellion against God), and we won't be scattered across the Earth. God's good command for blessing was to the people was not to settle in one place, but to be fruitful and multiply across the earth. (Redefining good and evil). That is The World.

The World: How does it work?

#1 Mass Marketing the Flesh.

1 John 2 ¹⁶ *For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.*

Lust of the flesh- the animalistic impulse to maximize our cravings: food, alcohol, money, pleasure.

Lust of the eyes- Power, Conquering, Success, achievement, domination

Pride of Life- Autonomy, "Don't tell me what to do, don't cross me."

Notice how all three flow right from the garden. **Genesis 3:6**

Lust of the Flesh- "She saw that it was good for food" Lust of the Eye- "Pleasing to the Eye"

Pride of Life- "Desirable for gaining wisdom."

These are the very same temptations used by the Devil in the wilderness with Jesus.

Lust of the Flesh: Matthew 4:3 In Jesus' hunger: "Turn stones into bread" ...satisfy your craving.

Lust of the Eye: Matthew 4:9 "Bow down and worship me and I will grant you all the kingdoms of the earth."

Pride of Life: Matthew 4:6 "Throw yourself down" from the high point of the temple and receive the glory and awe of humankind.

These are very, very old mass-marketing schemes that become normalized in society and they keep being recycled and reused in every generation. Let me give you an easy one to see: cigarettes, In the mid 1960s more than 40% of all American adults smoked cigarettes. How did that happen? Through decades of mass-marketing campaigns targeted at the flesh- Look at the marketing campaigns... **[Picture Slide] Smoke for Pleasure-** "America's Sweethearts Lucy and Desi do it!", **[Picture Slide]** Guys, no girl will be able to resist you (who doesn't love that?), my favorite- **[Picture Slide]** Healthy! Doctor recommended. Now we laugh, and rightly so, "How is that possible?" How could so many people be fooled by that? Fast forward a few decades to today- 27% of high school students vape... Marketing- **[Picture Slide] It's like candy!** Or better yet, **[Picture Slide] its basically fruit**, which is healthy, and appealing to the expressive individualism of today **[Picture Slide] My time, My way**. Wow...These may seem obvious, but some deceptive ideas are mass-marketed in our culture that are less obvious. Maybe the most insidious idea= **Feeling good is being good. My happiness now = authenticity = morality**. This is essentially the path divorce has taken in the West. Now some divorce is justifiable (infidelity, abandonment of your spouse, abuse)...but most divorces in America are not that. They are "I just wasn't happy." And getting divorced because you aren't happy is following your heart and therefore you have the moral high ground in society. Pastor Todd told me of a popular life coach who was marketing herself this way.

The World: How does it work?

#2 Through Social Contagion.

Remember when **[Picture Slide] Forrest Gump** just starts running and keeps running across America, and it begins to catch people's attention. He's all over the news...they are asking him why? For women's right, for world peace? "I just felt like running." And people start coming out of the woodwork to join him thinking he somehow has the answers to the world's problems, he unintentionally creates slogans that become multi-million-dollar businesses. **[Picture Slide]** Until he gets somewhere in the desert and just stops. And says, "I'm a little tired I think I'll go back

home now.” [Slide] A social contagion can be observed in something as trivial as a yawn or getting the giggles with your friends or Beatlemania or a like the ice-bucket challenge a few years ago (how many of you did that?).

Psychologist Dr. Paul Marsden noted that “Sociocultural phenomena can spread through and leap between populations more like outbreaks of measles or chickenpox than through a process of rational choice.” Behaviors, both good and bad, spread through networks of friends, social media, schools, work environments...Social contagion can be co-opted by the world system in the form of a deceptive idea. As the saying goes “If you make it a trend you make it true.”

The Apostle Paul warns of or the world’s social contagion in Romans 12:² *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* The worst job I ever had was working at a Harley Davidson factory...now you say, “What that sounds awesome.” Nah- I didn’t see a motorcycle a single day. I sat in a dusty, poorly ventilated machine shop. I had a barrel of square metal cogs that I would drill a hole in. Eight hours a day. The most exciting moment was when the drill bit would break and I could walk to get a new one. Needless to say I didn’t last long there. Conforming to the pattern of this world is becoming like a cog, molded, conformed to think and act just like the world wants you to. When I rebelled in high school and thought I was breaking out to be my own person, the ironic deception was that I just became a cog in the world’s machine like everyone else. *The Message: Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.*

That isn’t to say that culture is all evil. There are beautiful aspects of our American way of life that image our creature- The concern for justice, freedom, equality and human rights, the concern about how we treat our planet, our entrepreneurial spirit, our protection and sense of responsibility toward the innocent and vulnerable- Americans take in more refugees, more unwanted children, care for people with disabilities far more than any nation in the history of our planet (now I would argue that those instincts are leftover from our Christian heritage)... But there is also much that grieves the heart of God that is accepted and celebrated in our culture. And the danger for us as Christians is that we can think we are in a cruiseship, not a battleship...and we can just drift with the ocean current without realizing how much of thinking and behaviors have come from the world, not the Bible.

“The greatest danger in the American church is the emergence of a DIY faith.” -John Mark Comer. A little sprinkle of this and that. It’s mixing the way of Jesus with consumerism, secular sex ethics, and expressive individualism. I’m going to go from preaching to meddling for a moment...I brainstormed some commonly accepted Christian deceptions and I came up with 32. If you want my full-list email me...but I will share a few: “Once you get into your 60s you can start coasting.” “God made me this way so it must be OK.” “It’s more important to be right than to love.” “My kids sports are more important than their commitment to church.” “The American dream is synonymous with God’s dream.” “We can dishonor, slander and make fun of our leaders.” This is just what we do. The number of memes of President Joe Biden around his age, or his health, or times where he may have lost his train of thought...But can you imagine

the Apostle Paul or John being sarcastic and making their leaders into memes and jokes? “I can watch and entertain myself with garbage as long as I don’t do it.” *Game of Thrones* among Christians... well all my Christian friends watch it...it’s not bad except for the graphic nudity, perversion, incest, language, brutal violence...and we aren’t watching because to be educated on the world...but for sheer entertainment.

David Tackle: In the Truth about Lies

“An alarming number of Christians are very prone to viewing their faith as largely a volunteer enterprise. They pick and choose which values they wish to adopt from Scriptures in which they will adapt from the dominant culture.

This syncretistic approach to faith is only possible because of the unexamined assumption that we are in charge of our doctrine, dogma, and morals rather than God.

Much of its appeal lies in the ability to blend in with the surrounding culture, minimize our discomfort, and still hold to the illusion of being Christian-like in one’s behavior.”

OK- Meddling over.

The World: What do we do about it? Well, some preachers may call for a cultural or political war against “The World.” A call to picketing and protests...or to detach from the world like the desert fathers and communities of the 5th century to escape the decadence of Rome. If you are looking for a church like either of these, we may not be your cup of tea. I don’t believe the best approach is a power war against the world, or the escape from the world...but rather being the remnant of light in the world. How do we do that? It starts with the world in here first...

A Call to Reflection, Honesty and Grace: How am I being conformed into the mold of the World? It’s easier to see the world in someone else than yourself. One of the practices of resisting the enemy is solitude and reflection. To get your head out of the conforming distraction of this world to retreat and evaluate. Would you have the courage to do that this week? Any shame that you feel, any awkwardness or self-defense you feel right now...allow the Spirit access to that to convict you and begin to change you. Confess that, it’s OK. Tim Keller says, “You are more sinful and dysfunctional than you ever dare admit and at the same time, in Jesus Christ you are more unconditionally accepted and loved than you ever dare imagine.” Allow the Spirit to bring that lie out and bring the gracious truth of the Gospel in.

A Call to Uniquely Christian Community: Jesus did not have a disciple he had disciples. The call to follow Jesus was and still is a call to join a community called the Church. Collectively we are better able to discern Jesus and his truth from the Devil’s deceptions and help one another override our flesh by the Spirit, and form a robust community of deep relationships that function as a counterculture to the world. Coming to church and living in community with other Christians is a way to remind ourselves, “We aren’t crazy. This is true! This is right and good.” Where it’s OK to say, “I don’t fit in anymore with the world and it really doesn’t get me.” There is a direct correlation between being in church and fidelity of faith and not being in church and

getting colonized by the world. The church must become a thick web of interdependent relationships between resilient disciples of Jesus deeply loyal to the way of Christ. We are not just against evil, we are for good. We are for love, enjoy, and thriving families, and children, and freedom and justice and unity. This is the way of Jesus- not power war, not escape...but become the light of the world.

Now that is a quick appetizer for next week, because we are going to look at the antidote to the enemy- we are going to learn, not only how to resist but how to thrive, how to not be conformed but transformed. And the secret is bound up in this beautiful imagery of Abiding in the Vine. Join us next week.