

ENEMIES OF THE SOUL

Today we continue our series, "Enemies of the Soul." Last week we introduced you to the following stratagem from John Mark Comer's book, "Live No Lies," in regards to how the enemies of the soul work together:

Deceptive Ideas (DEVIL) → that play to disordered desires (FLESH) → that are normalized in a sinful society (WORLD)

In our first study in this series, we discussed "the world" and the normalization of sin. Today, we're going to talk about disordered desires that are often described in the Bible simply as "our flesh."

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 2:15-17

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. During 21 Days of Prayer, we're praying for: My Life, My Family, and My Church. Why is it important to pray for our church? What should we be praying for our church? What could you do to carry out this practice throughout the year?
2. In our new sermon series, we're doing some "work on the soul" by identifying the enemies waging war against us. What has stood out to you most from the first two sermons in the series? How are these enemies of the soul (world, flesh, devil) at work in your personal life, family, and workplace?
3. Read 1 John 2:16 and Galatians 5:19-21. How would you summarize the Bible's teaching on "the flesh"? Where do the desires of the flesh originate? Can you think of some examples in the Bible where you've seen the desires of the flesh at work in someone's life? What happened as a result? Why are the desires of the flesh so destructive to our lives?

1 John 2:16, "For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world."

How the Bible uses the term "the flesh":

- Paul related our flesh to "sinful passions" in Romans 7
- John Mark Comer says, "The sinful appetite in all of us that feels natural to our bodies and yet is wrong."
 - There are sinful temptations that seem very natural to us that seem not even like second nature, but first nature to us
 - If you're honest, to suppress these feelings sometimes feels more unnatural than following Jesus by not doing these things

Galatians 5:19-21, “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Impurity, jealousy, envy, and those other things listed can seem pretty natural. These are the desires of the flesh. The Bible alludes to the idea of “cravings” here in Galatians 5 when it speaks of desires/ works of the flesh.

Concerning the flesh, the apostle John mentioned the “desires of the eyes and the pride of life.” How many times have those two things got people into trouble? Perhaps you saw something with your eyes, which *seemed* attractive, but in the end, it led to a lot of pain and grief.

How many times have you seen the destructive nature of your pride? The thought that you’re always right, that you don’t need authority or rules in your life? This “pride of life” statement also alludes to being a covetous person. As followers of Christ, we’re not to live that kind of life.

James 1:17, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

4. Sermon two in our series looked at four victory declarations that lead us to win the war against our flesh. These four statements emphasize what God says and what we do. What were the four victory declarations? Which one of the four stood out to you the most, and why?

Declaration One: I will not be deceived → the flesh leads nowhere good

The promise of the enemy (and we’ll deal with this more next week) is that the flesh leads to good places. The world will tell you that you’re truly living “free” when you do whatever you want. On the other hand, the Bible says that leads to being enslaved to sin. Your mind is the compass of your life. What you “think” will determine the course of your life. What will lead you to good places? The Word of God and the Spirit of God.

Declaration Two: I will stand in truth → the flesh doesn’t ultimately satisfy

Again, your flesh will tell you, “This is what you really want. If you get this, you will be satisfied.” Ecclesiastes says that God has placed eternity into the human heart, you long for things beyond this world, and that is only found in Christ

John Mark Comer writes, “Our strongest desires are not actually our deepest desires. What I mean by that is this, in the moment of temptation, the raging fire of desire that is your flesh – the desire to make a condescending comment about your coworkers, buy another pair of shoes you don’t need, overeat, overdrink, lust, ignore God, watch Netflix instead of reading your Bible – feels overwhelming and almost irresistible. But those desires are not actually the deepest, truest desires of your heart; they don’t come

from the bedrock layer in your soul. What is it you want? What do you *really* want? My guess is, if you go deep enough, you ache for God himself.”

Declaration Three: I will commit → to feed the right things and starve the wrong things

In Galatians 5, Paul talks about “walking according to the Spirit” so that you will not satisfy the desires of the flesh. In other words – I’m going to sow the right things, so I reap the right things. If I sow to sin, I will reap slavery to sin. Someone once said, “What you feed grows and what you starve dies.” We often think about sin in the opposite way – “If I can just get a little bit of this, it will calm down the temptation.” It’s the opposite! It enflames it! You reap what you sow, both positively and negatively.

Declaration Four: I will follow Jesus → He is eternal life

As we learned last week, this world is passing away, which means the desires of your flesh are too. We’re here just a little while, with all of our imperfections and temptations, but God gives us a way to live beyond this world, and it’s through Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul says in Romans 8:13, “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” If you live for yourself, you’ll die in your sin and go to hell. If you turn from a life lived for sin and turn in faith to Jesus, you can have eternal life.

5. Read Colossians 3:1-10. How would you summarize what Paul is teaching in this passage? Why does it take so much intentionality to set our minds on "things above" when battling the desires of the flesh? How does cultivating a more profound love for God help us stand firm in the battle against the flesh?

Colossians 3:1-10, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

6. Someone once said: what you feed grows, and what you starve dies. As you look ahead to a new year, what would you like to "feed"? What do you need to "starve"?