



## **BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Facing Our Stuff**

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Back in the 70's, there was a comedian whose trademark line was, "The devil made me do it." Now we laugh at that—I do too—but that statement is actually more true than untrue. In both the Old and the New Testaments, God affirms that there is an enemy by the name of Satan, or the Devil, who has an army of demons. It makes it quite clear that this is war. I would suggest to you that most people experience demonic influence on a daily basis. Now when I say that, what are the images that are conjured up in your head? You have an image of something out of *The Exorcist*: voices, and people flopping on the floor and frothing at the mouth. I would suggest to you, that doesn't have anything to do with what I'm talking about. As a matter of fact, the chance of you ever encountering something like that in your lifetime is extremely remote. I would suggest to you, that imagery is actually a very clever distraction by the enemy himself, to distract you away from what his strategy is. The enemy's strategy is much more subtle; it's much more powerful and it's much more effective than that.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to John, Chapter 8. I want to look at two passages, both written by John. The first one in John, Chapter 8, is a very important part of John's Gospel. Jesus clearly identifies Himself as the Messiah. He picks a very strategic time in the Hebrew calendar, and He stands before the people, and He says, "I am the light of the world; he who follows after Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." By John, Chapter 8, Jesus has put a significant amount of evidence on the table that validates He is who He says He is. You remember in Mark, Chapter 2, when Jesus said, "In order that you might know that I have the power to forgive sins," ---He said to the paralytic---"Rise up and walk." Now if you were in that crowd that day, and you saw that miracle, wouldn't you have to back up and say, "This doesn't seem like the average preacher"? By this point in John, Chapter 8, Jesus has demonstrated that He is God in the flesh, over and over and over again. The evidence on the table is significant, but the religious elite still don't buy it, and the tension between them and Jesus continues to increase. In this particular passage, Jesus is talking to a mixed audience, between those who seem to believe and those that are still choosing to deny.

We pick it up in Verse 31:

So, Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (\*NASB, John 8:31-32)

These are familiar words. Jesus said these words, or words like them, over and over again in the Gospels. If you are a Christ-follower, then you will know the truth and you will live the truth. To continue in the truth is a Greek word that is often translated "abide". You abide in it; you live in it; you know it and you live that way. Then with a reminder, that you shall

know the truth, and the truth will set you free. The Hebrew people responded—the religious elite responded—by saying, “We really don’t know what You mean, because we don’t live in bondage.” And Jesus responded to that by saying, “Well, actually you do. Anyone who lives in sin lives in bondage. But when the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed.” Then they got into a big discussion about who was right. The Hebrew people said, “Well, wait a minute. We’re children of Abraham. Abraham was our father, and because of our religious traditions, and because of who we are as the Hebrew people, we’re right and You’re wrong.” And Jesus said, “No, once again you don’t understand. If you were actually children of Abraham, you’d get it. But you don’t get it, and the reason you don’t get it is because Abraham isn’t your father.”

We pick up the story again in Verse 43. Jesus asks the question:

“Why do you not understand what I am saying? Is it because you cannot hear My word?”

He’s raising the question, “What’s the deal with you people? How come you don’t get it?” He answers His own question.

Verse 44:

“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies.”

Now again, let’s remind ourselves, Jesus was not saying these words to the prostitutes. Jesus was not saying these words to the sinners and the tax collectors. He was uttering these words to the religious elite. And He said to them, “You know, you really aren’t from Abraham, because if you were from Abraham, you’d get this. You have a different father and your father is the devil. And the devil is a liar. He’s a deceiver. He’s a murderer. As a matter of fact, not only is he a liar, that’s his very essence. That’s his very nature. He can’t do anything but lie.” Just as Jesus not only speaks the truth, Jesus is the Truth. In the same way Satan not only lies, but his very essence, his very nature is, he’s a liar. That’s all he brings to the table.

Now you start to put this together and it makes sense. If it is the truth that sets you free, then this is going to be a war of lies. Think of it this way: the enemy, Satan, and his demonic army, virtually have nothing to offer you that is better than what God offers you. Nothing! You can’t name one thing! Everything that God has to offer you is better than what the enemy has to offer. So, what do you do? He’s only got one option: “I must lie. I must deceive. I must promise you something I can never deliver.” It’s the only option he has. It’s very important for us to understand, this daily battle we’re engaged in is a battle, over what is true and what is a lie.

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The New Testament says that Satan is the god of this world. Another way of saying that is that he is the architect of the culture in which we live. He’s the architect of the value system; he’s the architect of the culture. The Bible says that he is like “a roaring lion seeking someone to

devour.” Just to make it personal, you need to know that, every single day you do have an enemy whose number one mission is to destroy you. The Bible says that he disguises himself as an angel of light. See, he’s very clever; he’s very subtle. One of the big problems with deception is, when you are being deceived, you don’t know it. That’s the whole point. You think what you believe is true. You think you’re on the right track. You think that this is going to work out for you. That’s the whole deception. He disguises himself as an angel of light. The Proverb says, “There is a way that seems right to a man or a woman, but the end is destruction.” That’s right where these Jewish people were. Over and over and over again, Jesus had demonstrated to them, in ways they could not possibly have missed, yet they couldn’t see it because they were so deceived.

When Satan is described as an angel of light, one of the first things that comes to my mind is religion. I’m convinced one of the cleverest of all the enemy’s ploys is religion. It’s exactly where these people were. They were steeped in their own traditions. They were up to their eyebrows in their own religious beliefs, to the extent that they could no longer see or hear truth, even when it was so evident before them. I think this is a huge problem for us. I hear it all the time from people. Their response is, “Well, I’m Catholic; Well, I’m Baptist; I’m Methodist; I’m Lutheran; I’m an Adventist; I’m a Buddhist; I’m Berean.” Put whatever you want in there. People get so stuck in their religious traditions; they get so stuck in a belief system, that they’re no longer pursuing what is true. They’re just seeking to defend what they’ve always believed. And it reaches a point where they can no longer see the truth, even when it’s clearly presented before them. The enemy, he’s a liar; he’s a deceiver, and he’s very good at what he does.

Jesus says a really interesting thing in verse 45:

“But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.” (John 8:45)

Now look at what He said. He didn’t say, “Even though I speak the truth.” He says it’s “because I speak the truth.” In other words what He’s saying is, “The reason this battle is gaining intensity is because I’m speaking truth.” There were lots of false religions in the first century, which the religious leaders completely ignored. But, without question, Jesus was in their crosshairs. Why is that? That’s what He’s saying here. Because the enemy doesn’t really care what the lie is; the world is filled with lies; they’re all fine with him. He’s only got one mission, and that mission is to attack what is true. So, Jesus is saying because this is true, they’re on the attack.

That is really interesting to think about. We live in a culture today where people say, “You know, all religions are basically the same. They all eventually lead to God.” Let me ask you a question then. If that is true, then why is it around the world today, there is only one belief system that is systematically attacked on a daily basis? There’s only one, and that’s Christianity. If they’re all the same, how do you explain that? The enemy is fine with all the lies, but where he’s going to put his focus of attention, is on that which is true. I mentioned that a couple of weeks ago—we see that in our own country. It is completely politically incorrect, very intolerant, to mock or make fun of any world religion, except one. Today they make entire movies for the purpose of mocking the Gospel of Jesus. They have entire art shows for the simple purpose of mocking the Gospel of Jesus. Comedians have their whole routines, simply for the purpose of mocking Jesus. Why is it that every other world religion is off-limits, but one? Could it be the architect of this culture has his eyes set on the one, and the only one, that is true?

It's possible, in this culture in which we live, that this may be one of our strongest apologetics, raising the question, "If they're all the same, why is it that one is persecuted above and beyond all others?" Jesus is answering that right here: it's because it's true. And the god of this world is fine with the lies; he is on a mission to destroy what is true. Every day, we're bombarded with lies. The enemy is on a mission to destroy you. And he's going to do it with the most subtle of lies, regarding decisions you make every single day. In Romans, Chapter 1, Paul talks about this movement from what God always intended for us, into immorality, into sexual immorality, and into homosexuality. And he puts it all under the umbrella that they exchanged the truth for a lie. That's the deal.

Turn with me now to 1 John, Chapter 2. John continues to talk about this same subject. I want to give you an example of the enemy's strategy in a very specific, practical way. In 1 John, Chapter 2, John is talking about overcoming the evil one, and how we do that.

We pick it up in Verse 15. He says:

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1 John 2:15)

What does he mean by "the world"? He means the world's system. He means the system of the world that the enemy has put into place and the "things of the world" are the expressions of that value system. He says you can't love the Father and love the world. There's a world system; it's designed by the enemy to destroy us. You can't love the world and love the Father. It would be very similar to my saying; I can't love my wife and a mistress. I can't love them both; I'm going to have to make a choice. That's exactly what he's saying. It's very similar to what Jesus said in the Gospels. So, what does he mean by "the world"?

For all that is in the world (he's going to define it), the lust of the flesh... (vs.16a)

Now what do you think of when you hear those words "the lust of the flesh"? A lot of people immediately think of sexual sins, or some sort of debauchery, or...whatever. That's really not what he's talking about here. If you go all the way back to the Old Testament and track it through, the proper definition of flesh is that which I can do apart from God. It's what we talked about from Genesis 3. It's that lust, that desire, that craving I have deep within me, as someone made in the image of God, to be my own god. I want to run my own show. I want to call my own shots. I'll decide for myself what's right and wrong. And the lie of the enemy is, "If you do that, you will be free." But of course, that isn't the route to freedom; that's the route to bondage.

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Arnie: So, Bryan, what's the primary weapon of the enemy in America today?

Bryan: I know we say this a lot. Maybe the listeners feel like we're a broken record, but it's lies. It's back to Genesis Three. I like to think the enemy has virtually nothing to offer that's better than what God offers. So, the only chance is lies, lies, and more lies.

Cara: Our best defense then is knowing the truth. We spoke about that in the last few series, in One and Two of Peter, and then in Jude. Your argument, that people attack Christianity because it's true, is really fascinating. Talk more about that.

Bryan: Yeah. So, the language Jesus uses is so interesting, when he says to the religious leaders, because I tell you the truth. He doesn't say, even though I tell you the truth, it's because I'm telling you the truth. And I think what he means by that, is that's what's creating the fight. So, people today want to say, all religions are equally valid, yet there's only one religion, especially in America, that is consistently mocked and laughed at. And that's Christianity. So, it raises the question, if they're all equal, how do you explain that? And Biblically, what Jesus is saying is, you explain it because there's only one that's true, and that's the one that Satan's determined to attack.

Cara: Bryan, this spiritual warfare is a real thing, but there's actually a wide range of ideas of what that is. Can you just set us straight then?

Bryan: Well, I think Biblically, primarily it's a battle for truth. It's subtle. It's about everyday lies. It's not about being some sort of spiritual Ghostbuster. It doesn't look like Halloween. I think that's just a whole big diversion. But Jesus said it's about abiding in the truth.

Cara: What's our part then in the war?

Bryan: Yeah. So, to know the truth; truth is going to set us free. So, Paul talks about putting on the armor, but the armor is nothing more than the truth of who we are in Christ.

Arnie: You know, as a kid, and really, growing up, I lived in a lot of third world countries where they really believed in demons. But a lot of us in the U.S. have kind of lulled ourselves to sleep that there's really no demons. There's no evil out there.

Bryan: Yeah. So, I think you're totally right about that. And then on top of that, if there's no absolute truth, no absolute morality, there's no evil. There's no real morality; then this should be Heaven on Earth. But it's not. The more secular we've become, the more bondage, the more violence, the more chaos, the more fear. And we blame the environment, we blame genetics, we blame everything, except the reality that there is evil in the world. And until we come to grips with that, we're not going to come up with solutions.

Cara: I don't understand how anyone could say that, but then lock their door. You know, it just doesn't seem to make sense to me. But spiritual warfare though isn't something that we have to rally to fight against, every now and then. It's actually a daily battle.

Bryan: Right. It's totally a daily battle. And how I like to describe it, is the Bible talks about the big three: the world, the flesh, and the devil. I like to say, put them in a blender; mix them up. They're always at play, all the time, every day. And you have to be prepared to deal with that.

