

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Facing Our Stuff

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Turn with me to 1 John, Chapter 2. 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. (*NASB, 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 in the world” are the expressions of that value system. We'll talk about that in just a minute. 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 last week 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.

There's a lot of good that's done in our world today that is driven by the lust of the flesh. Religion is the lust of the flesh. That's why it has such appeal. There's something deep within me that wants to believe I can do this myself. I can earn this; I can merit this. I can be religious enough that, at the end of the day, God says, “Okay, you're in.” I can pull it off. There's something deep within me that wants to believe I can do that.

In every arena of life, we experience the reality that you don't get something for nothing. You have to earn your way. It is a performance-based culture and we experience that at every turn. So, it's logical to think that's the way it works with God. And the reason it has

mass appeal, is that it appeals to the lust of the flesh, and a belief that I can do this myself. I can be my own savior.

You go all the way back to Genesis 2, and we remind ourselves that Adam and Eve found their significance, found their value, found their purpose in life, by being rightly related to God. And it is out of that relationship, that they lived life. But in Genesis, Chapter 3, as we studied last week, when they sinned against God, they were immediately cut off from that relationship with God. So now that I'm cut off from my source of significance, my source of meaning, my source of purpose, now what? I'm going to have to do it myself. I guess I'm going to have to be my own god. I guess I'm going to have to find my own significance. I'm going to have to define my own meaning. I'm going to have to determine my own purpose....and that becomes the lust of the flesh. It's based now on my ability to perform. As my own god, the only way to evaluate my significance and my value is on the basis of my performance. But how do I measure that? Well there's only one way to measure it. I have to measure it on the basis of how I compare with you. If I compare favorably with you, I feel better about myself. If you are better than me, then my self-esteem goes in the tanker. And every day, that's life: up and down, and up and down. And even on my best days, when I'm at the top of my game, what about tomorrow? And what about the next person that walks through the door? It's a "no-win" system. It is relentless, and it destroys lives every day.

In a performance-based value system, I'm not free to love you, because you're the competition. I have to compete with you; I have to compare with you. I can't really celebrate who you are, because the possibility is that you might be better than me...and I can't celebrate that! That's going to send my self-esteem into the tanker. So, I'm really not free at all—I'm enslaved to this value system. And life is about competition and comparison.

You may have walked through these doors feeling that you were pretty successful. On a comparison basis, you compare well. So, what's in your heart is arrogance, because the basis of your self-esteem is, "I'm better than they are." On the other end of the scale, you walk through the door and you have a very poor self-esteem. If you're going to be honest, you kind of think of yourself as a bit of a hopeless loser, because you don't think you compare well. Whether it's arrogance, whether it's a low self-esteem, both of you are worldly to the core. Now I know what's happening right now. Those of you who struggle with a low self-esteem are saying, "Oh, thanks a lot...just one more way that I'm a loser." [Laughter] I'm going to ask you not to do that. I'm not saying those words to hurt you. I'm saying those words for you to understand: if you don't get out of this performance-based value system, it will destroy your life. The system you're using to define your value is a lie, and it is intended to destroy you.

John goes on:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes... (vs.16a, 16b)

In both the Old and New Testaments, the lust of the eyes refers to covetousness---stuff and more stuff. We would probably use the word today, "materialism." If we're going to thrive in a performance-based system, there has to be some way to keep score. "I don't think you

really understand...I'm really something." So, I have to have a way to convince you of that, or no one's going to know. So, in our Western consumer culture, it's "stuff". It's the car I drive. It's the house I own. It's my job title. It's my income. It's my profession. Those are the ways we put points on the scoreboard. If you think of this like a game, there has to be some way to keep score. That's what he's saying, "the lust of the eyes": covetousness, materialism; that's how we keep score. I will show you my value on the basis of what I own.

If you don't think that's true, go back to a ten-year class reunion, and listen to the game. That's exactly what it is, and we all know that's the way the game is played. And when we get caught up in that way of thinking, we end up buying cars and houses we can't afford. We have credit cards that are maxed out. We convince ourselves that we need unimaginable amounts of money in the bank to retire—more money than we could spend in a lifetime, because that isn't really my retirement. That's my self-esteem. That's my sense of significance. That's my way of saying, "I'm somebody. I matter." The reason we struggle as Americans to be a generous people, is because we cannot afford to give money away, because that's taking points off the scoreboard, and, "I can't afford to do that. I'm barely keeping up as it is." And so, we can't really afford to be generous, because my self-esteem can't take it. So, we consume our resources ourselves, and that's part of our statement: "You need to know I matter."

He says:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, this is not from the Father, but is from the world. (vs. 16)

All of this comes from the architect of the culture. It's his lie; it's his deception and it's intended to destroy you.

The world is passing away, and also its lusts... (vs. 17a)

It's John's way of saying, "Hey, this doesn't work. I don't care who you are. At the end of the day, it's a system that cannot deliver the goods. It's a system devised by the architect of this culture and the intention is that it will destroy you." You say, "Wow, is there an alternative?" Yes, he says so at the end of the verse:

...but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (Vs. 17b)

He's talked about it a lot in 1 John. There is an alternative. It's this scandalous thing we call grace—to believe that God Himself actually became flesh, in order to die on a Cross, to become the Savior of the world and offer salvation to each one of us as a gift. It's not something I can earn. It's not what I deserve. It's just freely offered as a gift. And yet the overwhelming majority of people that will draw breath on this planet will say to that gift, "No thanks, I can do it myself," which is the lie of the enemy. The fact of the matter is, God's grace makes it possible for me to step out of this performance-based system and, on the basis of His gift, offer me the forgiveness of my sin, which now makes it possible for me to be rightly related to God. And now that I'm rightly related to God, that's where I find my significance. That's where I find my meaning. That's where I find my purpose. That's where I find my value....and it has nothing to do with my performance.

I would suggest to you though, that now that my significance is found in God, it sets me free to perform at a higher level than I ever could have, because it's no longer the basis of my significance and value. I'm no longer competing with you; I'm no longer comparing with you. I am actually free to love you. I am free to celebrate your successes, and it doesn't send my self-esteem into the tank to say, "You're really good at that." You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.

Over the last weeks we've talked about "Facing Our Stuff". We've talked about a lot of "stuff". But the sobering reality is that, if you don't get this one right, you stand no chance on the other topics we've talked about, because the only way out of the enemy's web is on the back of truth. And if you do not believe and live the truth, you have no chance to get out of that web. The world is filled with lies and deception. The logical question would be, "How do we know what's true?" The starting place has to be a living, dynamic relationship with the One who is Truth. It starts with the brokenness of the recognition: I can't be my own god. I can't be my own savior. I can't run my own show. I'm just not equipped; it's a lie. And, in brokenness, to recognize I need a Savior. I need to know the One who is Truth. That's where the journey must begin, and from there His Spirit will guide me into that which is true. It's what Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free." And when the Son sets you free, you are free indeed!

Our Father, we're thankful for the One who is Truth. Lord, it's a sobering reality to know there is an enemy with an army, whose mission today is to destroy me, to destroy us. Lord, his weapon of choice is the lie, and every day we are pounded with lie after lie. Lord, it is only when we know the One who is Truth that we can be set free. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Cara: Bryan, it's so important to remember what you just said, that Jesus isn't just a messenger of truth; He is truth. But the devil and his demons are real too. How do we understand that without living in fear?

Bryan: Yeah, so that's a great question, because that's not what we want. We don't want to end up in fear, because we've talked about spiritual warfare. So again, Jesus says the truth sets you free. The truth says, "Greater is He that is in us, than he that's in the world". So, we really have nothing to fear, unless we allow ourselves to be deceived by the enemy. So, one of the ways I sometimes illustrate this is, let's imagine that you're a young child, a preschool child, and I convince you there's a man-eating lion in the hallway. And if you leave, the lion will eat you. Now, chances are I could convince a child of that: the child's terrified. So, I leave, I go home, I come back in the morning; you're still in here. Have I controlled you? Yes. Is that true? No. That's how the game is played. Can the enemy control you? Yes. He controls you by telling you lies. And if you believe the lies, then he can have his way.

Arnie: So, Bryan, for someone who may be new to your teaching, when you talk about religion, you're not really talking about Christianity, are you?

Bryan: Right. So that can get confusing. So if you look up religion in Webster's dictionary, he's got a definition, and we talk about world religions and comparative religions. And all that's proper and has its place. But I would suggest Biblically, God's definition is different than

Webster's. Religion, generally speaking, isn't viewed positively in the Scriptures. It's man's attempt to somehow merit favor with God. So the easiest way to think about it, is to imagine two umbrellas. One umbrella is works. The other umbrella is grace. Biblically, there's only two options. Every religion has some sort of a "work", that's necessary to merit favor with God. The only exception to that is "grace". So there's only two categories, and Biblically, it would be grace, or essentially, religion.

Cara: What's the best way to resist the devil?

Bryan: James says, "Resist the devil. Draw near to God." A couple of commands there. So draw near to God, but to do that, then that requires, again, knowing the truth. So one of the ways practically to process this is, think of an area of expertise for you. And then imagine someone coming along and trying to lie to you in your area of expertise. You would immediately identify the lies, and have a great deal of confidence, that you do know what's true, and what's a lie. So it's the same thing. We're trying to get that level of understanding of the truth of God's Word. So we have the confidence - This is true - and [it] makes it much easier to expose the lie. A couple other things: you know, the writer of Hebrews says, "eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith". I'm a strong advocate of people not reading a lot of books on Satan and his demons. I just think that gets people's attention in the wrong direction. We need to fix our eyes on Jesus. We need to understand what's true, and that's the best way to resist the devil.

Cara: When Jesus was in the wilderness and he was tempted, do you think those were the tactics he used then to resist the devil as well?

Bryan: Well, he certainly quoted Scripture. So that's really helpful. But again, like you said, this was God in the flesh, walking on Earth, actually facing Satan Himself. So this is like a cosmic war, with probably the demons, wherever they were in the world, all coming to one geographical area. I don't know that that necessarily reflects what we should expect. There's lots of things Jesus does that aren't meant to be the model for how we should do it. So when He needed to pay taxes, the disciples went down, caught fish, the tax money was in the mouth of the fish. Is Jesus saying that's the way you should get your tax money? You know, I wish that was true, but there's lots of things He did uniquely, because He was God in the flesh. And so that encounter with Satan is helpful, because He does quote Scripture back. But I think the Epistle model would be a truth-based model, not some sort of a cast-out demon model.

Cara: Okay. That takes some pressure off, because I mean those are big shoes to fill.

Bryan: Yeah. So the New Testament uses the world sometimes as like the cosmos, sometimes as people - for God so loved the world - but most of the time it's a world system. So we often talk about not being like the world, and in the world, not of it, and all, but it's often confusing. What do we mean by the world? So I think the best way to think of it is, God intended for Adam and Eve to find their significance, their life, their meaning, their purpose, in a relationship with God. But as a result of sin, once they're cut off from God, then they have to figure out how to meet those needs without God. And that essentially is what defines the world system: is trying to find significance, meaning value, purpose, without God. So then, that's what John is talking about: "the lust of the flesh", which a lot of people mistakenly see that as, like sexual sin and all that, but he's referring to flesh as the desire to be our own God. That's the lust of the flesh, my desire to be God. So cut off from God, I make myself significant, I give myself value, I define meaning and purpose, I try to come up with my own safety and security, and all of that is the lust of the flesh. And that's what defines the world system.

Then he talks about “the lust of the eyes”, which is typically language for covetousness, which I think in this context, is trying to figure out some way then to communicate: I am significant, I do have meaning, I do have value. So for sure in our Western culture, if you think of it like a football game, how do you put points on the scoreboard? Well, it's my title, it's my neighborhood, it's my house, it's my money, it's my stuff. And so that's how we're trying to say to the world, “Look at me. I matter.” And I think I mentioned in the message, if you don't think that's true, just go back to a high school reunion. We all get it. If you go back in a brand new Lexus, people look at you differently than a 10 year old minivan. It's just reflective of the world we live in. Ultimately, if I find life there, then it's the boastful pride of life. I have found what I'm looking for, because I think I'm better than you. And that's what makes me feel better about myself. And all of that ends up with this performance anxiety that ultimately destroys our lives.

Cara: I have a question. Satan is in charge of the world right now. He's the ruler of this world. In the end, he's losing, but, or he is going to lose. But, and someone said, that all this stuff that's happening so fast, all this despair and stuff, it seems to be coming to this fevered pitch, because he knows he's going to lose. And so he's just taking as many people now with him as he can. But do you think he knows he's going to lose?

Bryan: Yeah. So that's a great question. And I would say, I'm not sure. I'm not sure he does. I think when you look at the temptation of Jesus, I think he actually thought he could cause Jesus to sin. I think he thought he could win that battle. And you just wonder, is he so prideful that he still thinks he can win the battle? So my answer would be, I'm not sure. I'm not convinced he's clear he's going to lose, because of the sin of pride. Maybe he does think he can still win.

Arnie: Wow. That just blows my mind. I was always taught that Satan knew he was going to lose, but then I was also taught Satan doesn't know my future. He's not able to look in the future. So you really think it could be, he might think he's going to be the winner in the end?

Bryan: Well, I think first of all, to the second part of what you said, it's really important, we don't ascribe God's attributes to Satan and demons. So, [Good point.] he's not omniscient, not omnipotent, so he doesn't know the future. [Wow.] He can read the book and the book says he loses, but it's like, he's so prideful. Does he still think he could possibly win? I don't know. Maybe.

Arnie: Oh, he certainly could think that the book is wrong. [Sure.]

Cara: So, if Jesus is the victor; that means that we're victors as well. And that should make a huge difference in how we fight the battle then.

Bryan: Absolutely, it should. It's like watching a recording of a football game, already knowing who wins the game. It should change the way we watch every play, because we do know who wins in the end. It's really important.

Arnie: So Bryan, for anyone listening who finds that they're just drowning in this competition of this world, they're tired of the fight, this performance-based pressure. What is the way out?

Bryan: Yeah, I love that question, because the pressure is real, this performance based anxiety that destroys people's lives. It's like, no matter how good I am today, what about tomorrow? What about the next day? And eventually I can't stay on top, and people eventually just find that unbearable. So the way out, is the message of grace; that on the basis of God's gift, not on the

basis of our performance, I find my significance, I find my value, I've found my safety and security. And every day, because it's found in Christ and not my performance, it's secure. Nobody can diminish it. Nobody can take it away. I'm not going to lose it. And so it's safe and secure. And what I would suggest is, because that's true, because my performance is now not motivated by finding those things, but rather, out of the security of already having those things, that we actually perform better.