

## Week 2 | Three Enemies of the Soul

The year was 1941. Germany, reeling from what they thought were too harsh of sanctions placed on them from WW1, was bitter and on the move. Testing the waters of the international community to see what they could get away with. Hitler rose to power and fame based on a sense of national grievance and injustice that the outside world was holding the German people down, and they needed to rise up and take their rightful place in the world's stage.

So Germany pushed slowly but surely into surrounding countries. Taking over territory. Performing a new form of warfare called "blitzkrieg" - which was war by speed, rushing upon the enemy with such speed that they were overwhelmed even if they were more powerful. They used this strategy to invade France, thought to be a far superior military at the time. They then set their expanding sights on Great Britain.

As this next level of fighting ensued, we as a nation trained our collective eye on Europe. On Hitler's aggressive advances, and what that might mean for our involvement in the war. No one wanted to go to war again, to send all of mama's boys right back into danger and lose countless more than we just did in the first great war. Winston Churchill took over power in Britain because they needed a wartime leader instead of a peacetime leader, and he secretly hoped Germany would do something egregious enough to awake their sleeping giant ally in us - the Americans.

With our eyes pointed in that direction, something else was happening. On the other side of the Pacific, there was a small but disproportionately powerful island nation called Japan dealing with their own ambitions and sanctions. They too wanted to expand their empire, but many of our allies from WW1 held power over the nations they wanted to advance in. For their interests, we were a serious threat keeping them in check. We sensed that, and in an uncharacteristic move we moved the majority of our naval fleet and aircraft carriers to Hawaii. Just as a bit of a warning to say "we've got our eyes open."

I think you know where this is going, but in response, Japan called our bluff. They said, "No you don't...we know where your eyes are." While all of our newspapers and headlines were about the dangers creeping over Europe, they rolled a huge pair of dice. They knew that if they could somehow, some way--sneak up on and bomb the collection of war machinery we had stationed in Pearl Harbor, they would be free to move about the Pacific Rim of Asia undeterred--their biggest threat would be neutralized.

In what was actually a profound risk, they sent fleets of warships and bombers across the entire Pacific. Their only hope of a successful mission was to parade across an entire ocean and never be spotted by a commercial ship or plane, never have a fisherman be like "That's weird" and radio someone to raise eyebrows. They crossed their fingers and their toes as they crossed the ocean day and night, and... it worked.

They arrived undetected at the outskirts of Pearl Harbor, and within the wee hours of a sleepy Sunday morning on December 7th, an entire port housing the majority of our Pacific warships was wiped out, along with thousands of our people. We had no idea what was coming and were grossly unprepared for such an unexpected sneak attack. In fact, our military commander was scheduled to play golf that morning.

When you are in a war, very bad things happen when you get snuck up on. If you know the enemy in front of you but not the enemy behind you, you're in serious danger. What we didn't realize is that we truly were hemmed in on all sides, and that lack of awareness cost us dearly.

The Bible says - the same is actually true for you. Welcome to church.

**What would you say is the biggest problem or obstacle in your life? The biggest enemy, perhaps?** The thing that is causing the most amount of misery? The thing that is causing the most struggle or conflict in you? The thing that is causing you to fail to be the person you know you should be?

Or if you're a believer in Jesus, the thing that is keeping you from following Jesus fully and faithfully?  
What's that thing?

- I just work too much. I need a different job.
- I just need more money. If I had more money, I definitely would not be an anxious person.
- If my kids were quieter and had better listening skills, I guarantee I would not be as angry as I am.
- I need better opportunities, different education, less stress, better coping strategies, a different group leader, different pastor, different church, different city, a different president... and I imagine the list could go on.

While these certainly can be problems, and often get the bulk of our attention... **the worldview of the Bible claims these are not actually the greatest threats to your well-being.**

**We live in a context that almost solely focuses on the material.** Every object is a purely physical object. Every event that occurs has a purely physical cause. And thus every problem is a purely physical problem.

- Are you stressed out? Take a vacation.
- Are you unhappy in your marriage? Get a new one... or go to counseling and get some strategies to make things better... and if that doesn't work... get a new one.
- Depressed? Anxious? Here's some medicine.
- Kids annoying? Get some time away from them.

And while the Scriptures would affirm physical realities to what opposes us, it also paints a more holistic perspective. The biblical worldview says there is more going on than meets the eye. The Bible opens up a whole other dimension of reality - a whole other lens by which to view good and evil and the tug-of-war we sense in our souls...

The assertion of the Scriptures is that everything that we see and sense is wrong in our lives and even society as a whole is the result of sin - birthed and influenced by what followers of Jesus for millennia have called "the 3 enemies of the soul" - The world, the flesh and the devil.

Now this exact language of "3 enemies" isn't used in the NT - but these words are and their ideas are seen throughout the Scriptures - and Christians adopted the language of "3 enemies" to put words to this sense that we all feel of a fight or a war of sorts all around us and within us- that goes beyond material circumstances and solutions.

One particular place all 3 are referenced is in **Ephesians chapter 2**. Which is where we'll be today.

**Ephesians 2:1-5** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— **3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

So here you can see them... "And you dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked... following the course of this world - **the world.**

"Following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" - Now that's a lot of words by obviously, Paul is talking about a spiritual being of evil - what Jesus calls "**the devil**"

"Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh" - **the flesh.**

These are our enemies. These are the things, according to the Bible, actually set against you. Not your kids, not your marriage, not your job or income or your time or any of that circumstantial stuff - though

certainly those things are affected... but true obstacles we face as followers of Jesus are the world, the flesh and the devil.

For the next several weeks, we're going to look at each of these in a bit more detail to develop something of a theological understanding of our spiritual warfare, but today I just want to set the stage - to introduce us to the reality we find ourselves in. So, let's talk about these enemies for a few minutes.

### **First, the world.**

'The world' is used in different ways in the Bible. Sometimes it refers to the planet. Sometimes it refers to all mankind like in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world."

But here, "The world" is a system or a pattern or a way of being - that is opposed to God. Another example would be in Romans 12:1 - "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world." or the mold of this world.

World here means **sinful ways of thinking, living and believing that defy God that become normalized to those living in a society.**

I heard one person say recently, "the world is any way that sin is made to seem normal and righteousness made to seem strange."

**One example, among thousands I could give you, is our culture's particular emphasis on the here and now.** A secular society like ours, by definition, says the most important thing is your personal happiness today. Today is all you've got. You only live once, so live your best life now.

The subtle - if not often not-so-subtle message - is to **make decisions that are going to maximize today** - even if that's at the expense of tomorrow. So go buy the car... upgrade the kitchen... or you know what... just go out eat a bit more... enjoy your life, put it on the credit card if you have to. If you're unhappy in your job or your marriage or your neighborhood, leave! Leave today!

**Practically speaking**, what happens is we often go into debt, fail to plant roots or build deep relationships, and potentially even leave hurt in our wake - but that's okay - we tell ourselves - because we're going to be happy... and that's what matters.

Now, biblically speaking, according to 1 Timothy 6:12, we are to take hold of the eternal life to which we were called when we made our good confession. Righteousness and joy aren't found in living for today, but in living for eternity. We are to, for example, not store up treasure on earth, but store up treasure in heaven.

**But, when we look around... no one does that.** Pursuing the maximum standard of living for ourselves here and now is normal. It's what almost everyone does... such that we don't even question it most of the time when we see it ourselves or in others - that's what is meant by the world. Patterns of living that defy God that are the assumed norm.

### **Second, he mentions the devil**

following **the prince of the power of the air**, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—

This is one of the many ways the NT talks about the devil - **a spiritual being of evil working to steal, kill and destroy the work of God.**

And I assume this is the one many of us are going to get a little hung-up on. Maybe you're thinking something along the lines of, "**Really, Bailey? The devil?** The world - I can get behind. I might argue with you about how negative you are about it, but I can at least see what you're saying. But do you really expect me to hold the position that there is some supernatural creature of evil lurking behind the world like a shadow-y puppet master running the show?"

Yeah, pretty much.

Listen, I'm not going to try to **excuse or explain away the things the Bible** says to make it more palatable for our 21st century sensibilities. The worldview of the Bible, even more specifically, the worldview of Jesus - is that we live in a world that is inhabited by more than what we see. There are real spiritual realities and real spiritual beings that are a part of this.

And I understand that as good, modern Westerners we are highly suspicious of that claim. I promise, we're going to talk about this more in the coming weeks - but I **want to invite you to suspend your disbelief** for a moment - and try to throw out your preconceived notions of who you think the devil is - perhaps some red dude with horns and a pitchfork trying to get you to do bad stuff... and consider how the Scriptures actually talk about him and see if that doesn't actually make sense of your experience.

In the Bible, the devil is referred to in a lot of different ways, but he is most often called "**the deceiver**" or "**the accuser**" or the "**father of lies**". The Bible presents him not strictly in terms of someone who is trying to trip you up or get in your way - by, say, making your toaster not work so you lash out in anger because it made you late to work or by getting that attractive young woman to cross your path so that you succumb to lust.

**Rather, his chief strategy is deception and lies.** His chief mode of operation is to get you to think, believe and see things that are not true... such that you turn from God to your own way.

We see this all the way back in **Genesis 3** and the garden... the serpent's - which serves as a stand-in image for this being called the devil - chief strategy of temptation was, "Did God really say?" Maybe you got the information wrong? Maybe that's not what he really meant? "Maybe, he's not telling you the whole truth. It's not actually bad for you... God knows if you eat it, you will become like Him. He's actually the one holding out on you." Lies. Bent truth. deception.

In essence, his strategy - for say, lust or unfaithfulness as an example - is to get you to believe, "It's okay to look. There's no harm in looking. In fact, it's only natural." So, he doesn't have to cause anyone attractive to cross your path... he knows when someone does... you'll fall in line.

This is why Paul in Ephesians 2 connects the world and the devil so closely together. Because what's the easiest lie to get you to believe? The same one that everyone else does.

Why bother popping up on your shoulder with horns and pitchfork to tempt you to sin... when he could lead you to sin without ever needing to show up... without ever needing to make it seem like he's there?

**So, there's the world and the devil, but then there's enemy 3...our flesh.**

And this one is as equally important as the other 2...

among whom we all once lived in the passions of our **flesh**, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind,

Once again, the Bible will use the word flesh to mean different things at different times, but most often it used to describe the most fundamental, basic drives of humanity - as one pastor I heard recently put it - "the flesh is **our base, animalistic drive for self-gratification.**" That thing that internally cries "I want" "I fear" and "I must have". Drives, or if you prefer the word - cravings - that essentially run the show for our lives.

Again, much more to come on this, but I love the way that African church father St. **Augustine** talked about this. When he talked about the flesh, talked about it in terms of "**disordered loves**" or "**disordered desires.**"

In essence, the flesh is how we either love the wrong things, or love the right thing in the wrong order. So, for example, it's not bad to love your career. But when you love it more than your son or your daughter, that's a disordered love, and it will wreak havoc in your soul, and the souls of the people you parent.

It's not bad to love your teenager or your kid. But when you love him or her more than God, that's a disordered love. And it will wreak havoc on you and other people in your community.

To continue the example from earlier...One of the reasons accumulation of debt has become normalized is because it plays to our disordered desires for comfort and approval and power and control. It's not just that the pattern of the world is to chase money, and wealth and stuff at all costs... it is that, but it's also *I want to*. I want to because of the comfort I believe it will give me. I want that status. I want that power.

And this is why understanding the flesh is important because if you only focus on the other two, you might leave with the impression that you're a victim in this whole thing. That sin isn't really your fault! The deck was stacked against you! That the big bad world and the big bad devil conspired against you to put you in this precarious position.

But that's not the deal. What Ephesians 2 is telling us here is that we join forces with the world and the devil to our own demise. That we, in fact, are just as culpable for our sins and our struggles and the things that are wreaking havoc in our lives - as external forces.

One pastor summarized their relationship this way - **Deceitful ideas (the devil), that play to disordered desires (the flesh), that are normalized by a sinful society (the world).**

And I find that to be so true. So for example, the devil offers us this deceptive idea that "uninhibited sexual expression is the key to happiness" which comes alive in my flesh - this disordered desire within me that craves to sleep with who I want when I want... and I see people around me doing the exact same thing - even going as far to treat the idea of restraint as backwards and repressive - and they seem happy... and I want that... So, I take it. I disregard God's intention for my sex life - and choose to do my own thing. This is how it works.

**What this text ought get us to see here is that our analysis of what's wrong in us and in the world - is often far, far, too simplistic.** It's not simply external circumstances and material things - but something much, much deeper.

**Why am I so messed up?** Why do I blow up on my kids? Why do I lie to my boss? Why do I look at porn? Why do I struggle with addiction? Because there is evil within me, because I'm dishonest with myself, and I'm clinging to things I shouldn't be clinging to. Because there's evil outside of me. My parents or someone maybe sinned against me or someone taught me to think and believe in ways that aren't true, or I'm surrounded by patterns of sinful thinking and behavior that make these decisions just seem natural - and then there's also evil above me. A hierarchy of supernatural evil that just aggravates, coordinates, and manages the evil within you and outside of you.

**Why is the world so messed up? Because it's full of people exactly like you and me caught up in the same spiritual conflict as we are.**

This is why all of the solutions we hear thrown out to fix our society - especially in an election cycle like we're in currently - never seem to fully work... no matter which side of the aisle proposes them... because the solutions are always material... and our problem goes much deeper than that.

The Bible invites us to see that our problems - both on the grand corporate level and on our personal level are far more complex than just the material. And until we realize this, we're setting ourselves up to be defeated. Essentially, we are focusing our attention to what's happening in Europe... without seeing the danger in our own backyard.

**St. John of the Cross:** “All the evils to which the soul is subject proceed from the three enemies already mentioned: the world, the devil and the flesh. If we can hide ourselves from these we shall have no combats to fight... If we do not conquer the three, we shall never perfectly conquer one; and if we conquer one, we shall also conquer the others in the same proportion.”

He's saying these 3 enemies are the only real enemies out there and they always at work in tandem with each other - and must be addressed in tandem with each other.

**But, according to Eph. 2... we are hemmed in on every side. We are encircled. The word used is “dead.”**

**And we'd do well to see the gravity of that language.** What Paul is saying is that without intervention from something outside of you - the 3 enemies of your soul have actually won.

I don't know the last dead person you were around and what they did... but one thing I can tell you they didn't do was anything to change the fact that they were dead.

**You see, sin is not just an action. It is a condition.** What I mean is none of us *learned* to sin. Nobody had to sit down with you and teach you how to lust or covet or anything of the sort. You figured that out all on your own. Sin isn't just an action... it's a condition and a condition you have.

We tend to be comfortable with the idea that other people are sinners, but a bit more resistant to the reality that we ourselves are sinners. Other people, sure, but me...I make mistakes. I have some bad choices in my past. I have some trauma that I'm working through and really I'm a victim.

**We don't think we need to be saved, we think we need to be helped.** We just need some ways to decrease our stress and manage our lives a little bit better. We just need some healthier coping strategies or a stronger group of friends. We think what we really need is to simply realize the strength we already possess inside of us. And when we actualize those things, we'll be able to defeat our enemies.

But, our problem is not that we're good people who occasionally lose our way and do bad things. We are people who have bought into the lies of the devil to suit our own sinful passions like the rest of the world around us... and thus a people who deserve whatever that sin is due. Like the text says, we were “children of wrath” - or rather “heirs of divine justice” - if you find that language more palatable.

I don't know where we got the idea that God being a God of love means He's indifferent towards evil, but it was not from the Bible. You aren't indifferent towards evil that harms someone or something you love. Neither is God. He is not indifferent to the corrupting work of sin on the creation He loves... including its corrupting effects on the very perpetrators of it made in His image. And He will execute justice on it.

And so it's real simple - the first thing, we need when it comes to tackling our enemies... **is for someone or something to take us and make us *their enemy* instead of *their ally*.** Something or someone to take us from death to life.

**In short, we need saving.**

and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **4** But God, Anglican priest John Stott calls this the “greatest 2 syllables in the English language.” But God... being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

In a showing of divine mercy, God chose to rescue us from team death and bring us to life.

Notice this is all in **the past tense**. Not “will make us alive” but “made us alive” It’s in the past tense because Paul is referring to what Jesus already did on the cross. He’s not talking about some gradual religious process of coming alive, where you slowly become a good, God-fearing person. He’s talking about something that Jesus did and accomplished for once and for all. At a definitive moment in history.

**On the cross, Jesus became our sin.** Died the death we deserved. He was treated like he was a follower of the devil, a son of disobedience, a child of wrath - in our place. And rose to new life to secure for all who would trust in Him new life from their deadness.

I know Christians get made fun of sometimes for that word “saved” and it can sound a little backwoodsy. But I don’t know of a better word to describe what Jesus has done for us - He destroys the work of the devil - rescuing us from lies to truth - overcomes the world and it’s hopeless patterns to find life outside of Christ - and sets us free from the all-consuming slavery to our disorderd loves - **I’m sorry, but there is only one word I know for that: salvation.**

**And we’re saved by grace - which means we did not earn any part of it.** We didn’t really have anything to do with it. We were dead. Dead people don’t do things. They don’t decide things. Dead people don’t say one day, “I’m tired of being dead, I think I’ll get up and live a few more years.” You were dead. You didn’t decide you wanted to know God or that you wanted to live spiritually. You couldn’t decide that. You were dead. God makes alive.

So, what I need you to hear this morning, is when it comes to your biggest problem, your biggest obstacle, your biggest enemy - you don’t need to be improved, you don’t need edited, or updated or, upgraded, rebooted, or enhanced. YOU. NEED. TO. BE. SAVED. You need to be forgiven, restored, redeemed, and resurrected.

**You don’t need to adjust your life. You need new life.**

And friends, is what Christ has come to offer you. Jesus has overcome the works of the world, the flesh, and the devil. He has brought us life to where there was death. Such that now these 3 enemies - and the present and eternal havoc they wreak on your soul - do not have to be the final story for you... or for that matter, for the rest of the world either.

So the good news for those who are in Christ is that the devil and his forces are like a retreating army. The war has already been won... and while the final battle hasn’t yet commenced... the enemy has been defeated.

**But, what we often fail to realize is that there is still a battle.** There will come a day when, as the Scriptures say, Jesus finally puts every enemy under his feet - but that day is coming, it is not yet here. Thus, these 3 enemies still remain. There is still a fight to be had.

What I witnessed time and time again is people get sidelined and walked away from Jesus because they thought the battle was over. Thinking, “‘Oh, I’m in a LG so I’m good.’ or ‘I was brought up in church so everything’s fine’ ‘I asked Jesus in my heart so I’m good to go’... and the enemies of the soul just walk right back through their front door and make themselves at home. They were looking at Europe and neglected Japan.

I don’t say this to be all alarmist... but it’s just true... I have seen countless people fall away from faith in Jesus because they thought the battle was over. They prayed a prayer, got baptized, were even excited and pumped to be a part of church for a while - but put no defenses up against the enemies of the soul.

- **People who came to Jesus, but never let him change the way they thought about money and wealth** - such that they kept chasing it like the rest of the world around them - such that they took jobs that made them work 80-90 a week leaving no time for church and family and



eventually shipwrecked both in their lives - leading them to a point where they blamed God... when it really was just their decision.

- **People who became believers - told others about Jesus and served with a lot of zeal... but continued to buy the lie our culture believes that marriage and sexual fulfillment** - not God - are the keys to happiness. And when it appeared those were going to be unfulfilled in their life God's way, they opted to pursue it by their own.

And the truth is, none of this was an all at once thing. it's an excuse here, an unmet expectation there, a disgruntled spirit that doesn't seek reconciliation - it's a slow chipping away of your soul, you need to wake up and see that you are losing the fight.

People don't wake up one day and decide to walk away from Jesus, it's an apathy or an unrealisation that you have three enemies who want nothing more than to destroy you.

Almost 100 years ago, an Anglican bishop, **J.C. Ryle** wrote these words: "Let me talk to you about true Christianity. There's a vast quantity of religion current in the world that is not true, genuine Christianity. It passes muster, it satisfies sleepy consciences; but it is not good money. It is not the real thing which was called Christianity 1800 years ago... There are thousands of men and women who go to chapels and churches every Sunday and call themselves Christians. Their names are in the baptismal register. They are reckoned Christians while they live. They are married with a Christian marriage service. They mean to be buried as Christians when they die. But you never see any 'fight' about their religion! Of spiritual strife, and exertion, and conflict, and self-denial, and watching, and warring they know literally nothing at all. ...The saddest symptom about many so-called Christians is the utter absence of anything like conflict or fight. They eat, they drink, they dress, they work, they amuse themselves, they get money, they spend money, they go through a scanty round of formal religious services once or even twice a week, but the great spiritual warfare ... its watchings and strugglings, its agonies and anxieties, its battles and contests ... of all this they appear to know nothing at all.

Then he finally sits down and says, "Do you find in your heart of hearts a spiritual struggle? Are you conscious of two principles within you, contending for the mastery? Do you feel anything of war in your inward man? Well, let us thank God for it! It is a good sign. It is strongly probable evidence of the great work of sanctification. All true saints are soldiers. A real Christian can be known as much by his inward warfare as by his inward peace."

### **Following Jesus is a life of fighting the 3 enemies of the soul.**

I'll say it more simply: where there is life there is fight. Think about a newborn baby when it arrives. When a baby is born alive... There is fight. There is violence. There is screaming and crying and a little bit of kicking because she's here and she's fighting for breath. If a child arrives without that fight... something has gone wrong.

The same is true with your spiritual life. The person who has been brought from death to life - doesn't just coast, doesn't just float about. She fights. Where there is spiritual life, there is fight.

If you say you're a Christian, and there's not the warring, and there's not the exertion for the things God, it's either because you've fallen asleep or aren't actually a Christian. And I can't tell you which one you are... you've gotta do that discerning for yourself. But one of the two is true.

So, for this season of Lent, this is what we're trying to do. We want to open our eyes to these realities. To get out of our small views of our lives to see what is really going on all around us... AND FIGHT.

- Fight the lies of the devil with the truth of God.
- Fight the flesh by denying ourselves and putting it to death.
- Fight the pattern of the world be becoming a people who don't just go with the flow, but seek first the Kingdom of God.



This is why we're engaging in practices like fasting, and meditative Scripture reading and examen prayer... to help us see that the problems in our lives are deeper than simply stress and time management. **There is an enemy using deceitful ideas playing to our disordered desires in a world normalizing them...** and we need Jesus to deliver us from them.

If we can understand the strategy, it can change the game for how we fight.

The great Chinese military leader **Sun Tzu** in his famous piece **The Art of War** - "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

For the next several weeks, we're going to look at these enemies in a bit more detail and how we fight them as disciples. This is our aim for Lent - to know our enemy well... and know Savior even more.

**Pray.**