

Live No Lies-5

Second Enemy of the Soul: The Flesh

Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 7:15-25

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We are in week five of our series called, Live No Lies. This is a very timely and challenging series. Timely, because we live in a culture that has lost its moorings of truth and thus has become wide-open to the infiltration of lies. And challenging, because we're all infected with the cancer of lies, such as:

- The businessman whose father berated him any time he failed: I am only as good as I am successful.
- The teenage girl who, comparing herself with the mirage of Instagram, comes to believe I am ugly and unworthy of love.
- The mom who was a high-energy child, regularly scolded by her parents, who now believes: I'm a bad person.
- The entrepreneur whose prior business failed after the betrayal of his partner, and who now believes: Everything I do will fail.
- The middle-aged woman who was raised by an angry perfectionist mother and decades later still believes: I must be perfect to have peace.

These, and many others like them, are lies that sabotage our peace. So, in this series of messages, we've been looking at how to: Recognize and resist the three enemies of the soul that sabotage your peace.

The New Testament gives the account of three enemies of the soul: the DEVIL, the FLESH, and the WORLD.

Deceptive ideas (the DEVIL) - play to disordered desires (the FLESH) - and are normalized in a sinful society (the WORLD).

Read Ephesians 2:1-3.

Notice the three enemies of the soul:

The devil: "The prince [*archon*] of the power of the air."

The flesh: "We all once lived in the passions of our flesh."

The world: "Following the course of this world."

We talked three weeks ago about the devil, so now let's move to the second enemy of the soul: the FLESH.

The Greek word translated "flesh" in the NT actually has three meanings:

The NT word is *sarx*:

1. **The body (1 Cor 6:16);** "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."
2. **Ethnicity (Phil. 3:3);** "It is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh."
3. **Sinful passions (Eph. 2:3);** "Gratifying the cravings of our *flesh*." (Also, **Romans 7:5**— "For while we were living in the *flesh*, our sinful passions....").

What's the problem? We see at the core of our cultural consciousness is the West's view of reality, which says:

- The heart wants what it wants.
- Follow your heart.
- You do you.
- Just do it.
- Speak your truth.
- Be true to yourself.

1. How do you view some of the things on this list? What problems do you see with these views of reality?

Here's a quick breakdown of how we got where we are, and then let's look at how Scripture gives us the "true truth" that overcomes our flesh and gives us true happiness. Philosopher Charles Taylor describes it this way, that the West changed from a culture of authority to a culture of authenticity. We used to live by what *external* authority structures (God, the Bible, tradition) *told* us to do, but now most Western people live from their *internal* "authentic self" *wants* to do.

This perspective was fueled by how the famous psychologist, Sigmund Freud, viewed the human condition, that the path to happiness is found in desire for pleasure, and that the repression of desire is the basis for all neurosis. So, from our earliest stages of growth as children, we are taught that: "The reason you're unhappy is because other people are telling you that you can't do what you want."

But here's the problem: What our culture tells us is the path to peace and fulfillment (happiness) doesn't actually work. It's a lie. And that includes those who believe that whoever is elected president in a few days will bring us peace. That's a lie. Anything we chase after outside of Jesus to find ultimate peace and fulfillment will end in chaos. The world says we have to release the passions of our flesh in order to find fulfillment, and yet it actually leads to greater bondage. The way of Jesus says we are to discipline the passions of our flesh in order to find fulfillment.

The issue is not that desire is wrong; it's that Satan has disordered our desire. Augustine (4th Century) said, "The problem with the human condition isn't that we don't love; it's that we love either the wrong things or the right things *but in the wrong order.*" And when we have disordered love, we have a disordered path to find peace, and we chase after whatever gives us immediate gratification, which ultimately leads to the opposite of gratification—it leads to pain, loneliness, and brokenness.

2. In what ways has your desires been disordered? Where or in what have you looked for immediate gratification, and what did that lead to?

Read Romans 7:15-24.

This desire of the flesh is "desire distorted," and if we're honest, we all have to acknowledge that we have that infectious disease that leads to unhappiness and no peace.

Paul's exclamation: "Wretched man that I am!" And until we recognize that we cannot expel the desires of the flesh on our own, we will never experience the path forward to ultimate peace. Paul goes on to write: "Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24b-25a, ESV).

Here's where the disease of the desires of our flesh leads. John Mark Comer put it this way: "Giving in to the desires of our flesh does not lead us to freedom and life, as many people assume, but instead to slavery and, in the worst-case scenario, addiction, which is a kind of prolonged suicide by pleasure" (Comer, *Live No Lies*, 123).

3. Consider your desires of the flesh that you “do what you do not want.” Are you trying to expel the desires on your own? How are you turning to Jesus, “who has delivered you from this body of death”?

Main thought- Ultimate peace is found in pursuing the *right* desires and not *distorted* desires. Now, what do we do with it?

Takeaways:

- Celebrate your desire for beauty, love, freedom, and relationships. The way of Jesus does not begin with “No” but with “Yes.” We say “yes” to the right things, which gives us the freedom to say “no” to disordered desire.
- Create healthy rhythms that reorient your desires. Jesus said to take up our cross *daily* and follow Him. I have an older pastor friend who used to say that if you’re on the path towards Christ, by definition, you cannot be on the path towards your disordered desires.
- Commit to keeping in step with the Spirit. The Apostle Paul wrote, “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit” (Romans 8:9a, ESV). And he told the Galatians, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.... If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25, ESV).
- Connect with others who will speak truth in love. We can’t trust our own whims and desires, and we need others around us who are filled with God’s Spirit who will help guide us and support us to stay on the path towards peace and not stray towards the path of destruction.

As a church, we are a group of Jesus followers who are traveling companions helping each other take next steps with Jesus, believing that HE is the way, the truth, and the life. Our path to peace and fulfillment comes through Him, not through Self and whatever disordered desires that give us a quick high but never lasting peace.

4. We all need traveling companions. Who are yours and how you moving together?

Next Steps:

- If you would like to explore further the path towards peace with other traveling companions, text “PEACE” to 317-707-6462, and we’ll reach out to you.
- If you would like to talk with someone about what it means to pursue a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, text “FOLLOW” to 317-707-6462, and we’ll reach out to you. Or stop by the Next Steps Room, where people will gladly talk and pray with you.