

EVEN THE DEMONS

JAMES 2:19

Week of Jan 16 – “The Mind and Deception”¹

Overview:

Scripture and experience both inform us there are **three active agencies in the world**: (1) God (and His realm), (2) the Enemy (who has invaded and currently occupies this world), and (3) humans (living in a world held captive by the Invader). C.S. Lewis gets it right: “There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.”²

Information about Satan (the devil and/or demons) in the Old Testament is relatively thin (the notable exception being Job, of course, and maybe Zechariah 3). Yet, the ancients in virtually all cultures were as certain of the existence of gods and spirits as they were that there was dirt under their feet! Further, as we come to the New Testament, Jesus is clearly well-acquainted with Satan, his nature and realm, and his tactics.

Satan, in character and action, resists everything about Jesus and his mission. The Enemy prompted everything from Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, to Jesus’ confrontations with demonized people, and even Peter’s opposition to Jesus going to the cross! Satan is “the ruler of this world” (Jn 12:31; 16:11) and is constantly linked with the powers of sin (1 Jn 3:8) and death (Heb 2:14). His conflict with Jesus, the One characterized by “Grace and Truth” (Jn 1:14), was to be expected.

Jesus’ ministry of grace is aimed at the realm of darkness (e.g., Lk 13:16). The Enemy’s goal is to “steal, kill and destroy” (Jn 10:10), and Jesus actions were in constant engagement with this realm of darkness. The Enemy’s method of operation, his default mode, is as **a liar**. When Satan speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Pointedly, the Enemy’s “heart language” is **deception!** It is in his very nature! In Jesus’ most extensive teaching about the Enemy, he does not focus on exorcism and demonization, mysterious illnesses, unexplainable natural disasters, or even how to handle anger toward someone who hurt you. Rather, Jesus talks about truth and lies. And **Jesus has all power and authority over deception and empowers believers with that same authority to bring God’s kingdom here on earth.**

Group Objectives:

- Reflect on this past Sunday’s message and other devotional reading.
- Pray together and provide encouragement for other group members.
- Have each consider various sources of truth and how they may be empowered by the Spirit to live into the Truth. Not lies!

DNA statement(s) tie-in:

- *We are all for Jesus.* We know God best through Jesus, our Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King. Jesus and scripture are our only infallible sources for Truth!
- *We are empowered by the Holy Spirit.* God the Father speaks to us through the Bible, and we commune with him through prayer.

¹ This week’s lesson was written by Karl Pagenkemper and edited by Dawn Gentry.

² Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, 1967, p. 41

Conversation Starters:

- If you could have a fictional character as an imaginary friend, who would you choose and why?
- Did you have a person in high school or college to whom you could tell anything, and who could tell YOU anything? How did you feel/respond when they told you a difficult “truth”?
- Can you think of something Jesus says about you that you find hard to believe?

Read and Reflect: Inductive Bible Study Discussion

This week’s texts are Rom 12:1-2; 2 Cor 4:1-6; 10:1-6; 11:12-15

In Jesus’ world, as in ours, there is a serious battle between the Enemy and all that is good, true and beautiful (i.e., things from God). As John Mark Comer notes, “Jesus sees our primary war against the devil as a fight to believe truth over lies.”³ Almost all spiritual battle exists first of all in our minds, our thoughts, and our consciences. Deception is Satan’s stock and trade, and he wages war primarily in our thought world. So, where do we go to find truth? There are many legitimate sources of truth and expertise. However, the NT tells us that Jesus is full of Truth ... and the scripture is given as a reliable source of truth (it teaches, reproves, corrects, and points us to right living (2 Tim 3:16-17). It is with the tool of rightly interpreted scripture that we are able to “resist” the Evil One.

Start with the Romans 12 passage and, based upon time available, choose one or more passages from 2 Corinthians. You do not need to get through all of them to get the main points!

Rom 12:1-1

The first step in transforming our minds toward truth comes with offering ourselves to God. Verse one describes us as “living” (not dead) offerings to God.

- Why does Paul call this our “true and proper worship”? (The NASB has “acceptable” or “reasonable” ... a kind of “spiritual” act of “worship.”)
- Have you come to the point in your life where you have put yourself “on the altar” to God? Why is this important? What might hold you back in this area of your life with God?
- The heart of verse 2 is Paul describing the “renewing of your mind.” The verb “be transformed” is passive. So, who does the actual transformation?
- What is the outcome or goal of such mental renewal? “So that you may be able to test and approve” ... what? What characterizes God’s will in this text?

2 Cor 4:1-6

- What does 4:3-4 suggest about the role of the god of this world (who would this be?) in relationship to the mind of unbelievers? And what does he try to do?
- Have you ever talked with someone about spiritual things and sense they were simply “blind”? What are they blind to?
- Enlightenment is common in many religious traditions. What do you think it means that God “has shone in our hearts to give light”? And what does he enlighten us to understand?
- So, what does Satan’s activity look like in these verses?

2 Cor 10:1-6

The context of 2 Corinthians relates to personal challenges Paul was having with a struggling church. (Some people are challenging Paul’s methods of teaching and disciplines as too “worldly” in character. But the root of this conflict is spiritual.) The conflict takes place because people live “in the world”; yet goes beyond that.

- As you look at (especially at verses 3-5), where does the real battle take place in spiritual conflict?
- What is Paul’s strategy (v. 5) for dealing with such challenges with “divine power” (v 4)?
- What is it that Paul has to “destroy”? What is taken “captive”? What is the link with the passages already noted and the principle of this study?
- Do you sense any thoughts that need to be “taken captive” to Christ right now? Some will relate to God’s thoughts/heart for you personally, but some will relate to how you relate to others around you.

³ Comer, *Live No Lies*, 2021, 20

Summarize and Respond:

Jesus says some very pointed things about the nature of spiritual conflict in our daily lives.

- Do you agree that the primary focus of spiritual conflict relates to deception and lies? What are those lies about? (About God himself? about how God feels about you? about his priorities in our world?)
- What would it look like in your day-to-day life if you take God's character more seriously? In what specific areas do you need to "resist" the influence of the Evil One (Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9)?
- What might it look like if you understood and experienced God's love for you more completely? How can you experience that love more fully?
- What sources of "truth" are most important in your life, and what sources are most reliable? Do you need to make some personal adjustments to pursue "truth" (versus deception) more consistently?

Prayer Prompts:

- Invite members of the group to share personal prayer requests.
- Allow time for silent reflection on the following questions.
Is there anything getting in the way of your relationship with your Heavenly Father?
Do you need to repent, confess a sin, or surrender your pride?
Is there an area in your life in which you need to "resist" the work of the devil?
What specific steps might you take?

To Learn More:

- John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies: Recognize and Resist the Three Enemies That Sabotage your Peace* (Waterbrook, 2021).
- Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Baker Academic, 1997; especially chapter 1, 17-72).

Additionally Textual Study:

From John 8:39-59.

- Who do **you** think was deceived? Jesus or the religious leaders of the time?

From 2 Cor 10:1-6

- Can such "captivity" of thought only take place at the personal level? Or can it at times also be corporate/community in character as well?

From 2 Cor 11:12-15

This segment is part of a larger section about Paul's defense against spiritually dangerous people within the church, but the dangers are very real.

- What does verse 13 suggest about the spiritual character of those who would hurt the church? Why is character so important among leaders in the community of faith?
- Do you think those who oppose Paul may lack real spiritual life? Why? (See verse 15)
- How does Paul describe Satan (the accuser) in v. 14? What does this suggest about how he works in our lives? What terms used in verse 13 give us ideas?