

**Series: Battlefield:
fighting the flesh, the world, the devil
13th March 2022
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1 John 2:15-17
Spiritual warfare**

One day when I was a boy a friend of my dad was visiting from the states. This man was so surprised at how cheaply and readily available we could get music CDs and then DVDs. This, by the way, is how I sharpened my teeth as a worship leader. On burned CDs from Vineyard Worship and Hillsong. I received my first legitimate legal worship CD when I was in uni. But trust me I have had a collection of music for years. And I know there are ethical questions about availability here and distribution and all that. But most of us grew up in a time when piracy is just the rule of the day. That is how you move products. Until you become an artist, as some of you, does that begin to pinch.

The truth is at some point it became socially acceptable to steal people's music. If you could not get Eminem's music at the store in Kenya, you probably could have gotten Jua Cali's. So it is not about distribution, at some level it is okay with us.

There are things we do as a society, that no one even questions. They have become our way of life. And on close examination some of these things are wrong. Our city, country, and world have a way of normalising sinful patterns. This is what Jesus and the apostles called the world.

Last week we started our conversation on this in our series on Spiritual warfare. We are talking about fighting the world the flesh and the devil. Last week in our intro on the war on the world, I was making the point that our war is not with human beings, inviting s to be very aware, as we engage with the world, that there are elemental forces behind culture and society institutions, religions. And these are in rebellion against God. That is who we are at war against.

The invitation from Paul was to always bring every thought and idea into submission to Jesus Christ and the knowledge of God as we actively engage behind enemy lines.

Today, we will explore a bit more of that. Specifically talking about how we can mount a beautiful resistance while behind enemy lines.

Let's pray.

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

John 15:18-21

Again another reminder from Jesus, that we are not of this world. There are two ways of being. You either follow the way of the world or the way of Jesus. It is either, or. Jesus warns that if you follow his way, the world will hate you. If you follow the way of the world, you do not have the love of the father in you.

So when we talk about the world as an enemy of our soul, what do we mean? I do not mean the people of the world or the planet and nature. And in the Bible, the use of the world could also imply those. There is another use of the word world in the bible that is what we are talking about. It is the collective way of living that people of society find normal, even defend and fight for that is completely against God either subtly or overtly.

Dallas Willard calls it; “Cultural and social practices under the control of Satan and therefore opposed to God”.

Every city, every family, every country and the world has a way of life. Think of what things come to your mind when you say statements like

1. That’s normal for us...
2. That is just how we do it...
3. Nowadays people do that...

Some of those things are not bad and even beautiful, but sadly, many of those things we call normal will rarely invite you to follow Jesus closely. The way of life of Nakuru will rarely draw you closer to Jesus. Don’t get me started about Mawanga.

So what does the way of the world look like?

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life

—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:15-17

This is the way of the world. The lust of the flesh; meaning the push to fulfil our appetites at whatever costs and in our terms. Appetite for sex, food, travel, drink, fame etc.

An echo of the story from Genesis, “And eve saw it was good for food.” Meaning good to satisfy her appetite.

The lust of the eyes; to want whatever looks shiny at whatever cost. This is around greed, money, ambition, that next vacation, that next car.

An echo of the story from Genesis, “And Eve saw it was pleasing to the eyes”. Of all the trees with God’s blessing they had, she also had to have the one without.

The pride of life; is the lie that we get to determine what is right and what is good for ourselves. So hands of my body. The majority is always right, get rid of all authority, I know what is right. Project self.

An echo of the story from Genesis, “And Eve saw it was good for gaining of wisdom”. Meaning we have enthroned ourselves to be the ones to decide what is good and bad. We answer to no authority.

When we love these things we cannot love the father.

And that is where we are in the world. We are living at a time when what was once called celebrated is now condemned and what was once condemned is now celebrated and those who refuse to celebrate are condemned.

The author of the book Sapiens, who is not a believer said, “before it was God who determined good and evil now that authority has moved inside us: What I think. What I feel. If it feels good then do it. The customer is always right. The voter knows best.” And the world is a place where this culture is then normalised.

It is a steady slide since the garden of Eden for man to rebel against God and redefine good and evil for themselves. Then as a society, we normalise those decisions and patterns. They become a way of life. What we end up with further pulls you from God.

A. W. Tozer said, 'we navigate our place in the world by the Northstar of God and his vision of good and evil (morality) without which we end up lost'.

The Prophet Isaiah sees this and writes

“Woe to those who call evil good and evil good”

And it is more of grief. That is what we war against. The normalisation of patterns and cultures that are against God. And as each generation moves in this direction, we call it progress.

It is sad that we are at a time where call what is evil good, and normal and a way of life. The new Testament calls this the way of the world which is opposed to the way of Jesus.

The church has to realise that the way of the world is an enemy to our soul. To love the world is to be an enemy of God.

What we have now in the church is one end that has become militant in trying to 'Christianise' society or trying to relive the past of their Christian cultures. Even trying to have 'Christian' laws passed. But sadly it is a preference for looking good but not being good. It is a desire to conform everyone to behaviour they approve with no real change

On the other side, you have the church no longer fighting the world but being swallowed up by the world. We want our pastor to give a psychologically uplifting ted talk that further affirms me and never challenges us and the worship team to sound like a Sauti Sol concert and it is an added advantage if the worship leader unbuttons their shirts a bit like Bien. Not too much, just a little We might just carry them like the stars they are in the crowd over our heads. It is the world becoming like the church.

But they should never speak up against our ways of life. He should not make a comment about cohabitation, divorce, drunkenness, sexual ethics. Because now we know better and this how the world does things.

Those things belong in the past, God only cares about love and tolerance. And often what we mean by love and tolerance is anything that makes me feel good, affirms all my choices and leaves me to do all I want.

And what we have done as believers many times is to do a bit of mix and match. A little bit of Jesus and a little bit of the world. We want to pick and choose what values from the way of Jesus we wish to adopt and which some from the world.

We like it when the Bible says come to me all who are thirsty but we do not like it when it says crucify the flesh. We take that away because we do not like and add the world's value of being true to yourself and do whatever you want as long as it does not harm anyone. So we end up with churches that are so welcoming which is important but never calls people out of sin.

We like it when the bible teaches us to love our neighbour and protect life but we oversimplify the question of abortion as simply about a woman's right to choose and has nothing to do with life. I say that knowing that it is a debate coming to Kenya yesterday.

We like the idea of grace, that our sins are forgiven but we hate the idea of growth where we are invited to lean into transformation and conquer the devil. So we would rather mix it with the world's value for the illusion of forever young, live and let live, you only live ones and FOMO.

We want to blend in and minimise our discomfort by not standing out. You do not want to be the only twenty-something not sleeping around. You do not want to be the only man who cannot talk of a clande, you don't want to be the only sibling who does not drink crazy.

We blend in, we minimise our discomfort while trying to maintain the illusion of Christlike behaviour. Trust me, I am guilty of that too.

The world is not tempting you to abandon Jesus. It is not Jesus or... the lie the enemy is telling you is that you can do Jesus and... That you can follow Jesus and still...fill in the blanks.

We do not realise that the reason we think it is possible to do this is that we have bought into the ancient lie of the enemy that it is we, not God, who is in charge of our theology and morality. We might not think that we might not say that, but that is where it is coming from.

The challenge for the church today is to not get swallowed up by the world around us. So the question is, how do we fight the world?

This is what Paul teaches

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

And I like that he says transformed because it is not only about standing firm against the waves it is going against the waves. Being changed from the way our culture has formed us up until this point.

And also back to that story we have been telling in this series. Transformation of the mind. Watch out for the ideas you believe in and be keen to fill yourself with the truth.

We must look at God's word and pick his truth about life, no matter how against the grain and uncomfortable it is. Letting God be the one on the throne and not us. It is the safest surrender.

Do you know why this fight is hard? It is because these lies are appealing to our flesh. It is not only that it is bad, but it is also bad and I want it. There are things in this world that part of me wishes was right, but I know that they are not. These lies appeal to our flesh, our brokenness, our disordered loves.

Then it is hard because again, they are normalised in our culture. It is so easy to see what is wrong in the way others live their lives but not you because it is normal. Or to see how wrong other cultures are and be blind to your own. We gather from different cultures, we know that is true. I think this is why we relegate spiritual warfare to casting out demons and fighting the devil because fighting the world comes too close to home.

But the call is to come out of the world and land where God lands on all things even morality even when we ourselves struggle with it or we have questions about them and even when our stance becomes increasingly unpopular.

So how do we fight the world? We mount a beautiful resistance. La résistance. We are in the world but not of the world. We must go against the current.

1. The church is called to be anti-culture even while remaining relevant to the culture. And you are the church.

3. Become aware of what is the regular programming of our city in media, marketing and social sites and go against that, especially that which is opposed to God. Which is a lot.

4. We must say no to our city, for our city. Maybe the best way to love our city is to disobey our city. And I mean it's a pull to go against God.

5. Be in a community because you cannot do this fight alone.

6. Be found in God's word and around proper teaching because that is how we counter our city's lies

Let's Pray.