

2 Peter 3:14-18

[Paul's] letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Peter warns of distortions of God's truth. Not just of Paul's letters but of other scripture as well. These distortions can derail us. They can cause us to be "carried away" by error.

As Galatians 5:9 says in the Amplified version, half truths can **"pervert the concept of faith and mislead the church."**

David Wilkerson defines a stronghold as ***a mindset, value system or thought process that hinders your growth, the growth of others and you exalting Jesus over everything in your life.***

Strongholds are often based on half truths, and they cause headaches and heartaches.

The Good News? As Paul says in Corinthians we have the **"power to demolish strongholds."** And where half truths hurt, Christ says in **John 8** that when we know the full truth, that truth will set us free.

Colossians 2:15 - *He disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities [those supernatural forces of evil operating against us]. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.*

READ COLOSSIANS 2:13-20

"The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist."

The Bible certainly lets us know of the Devil's existence.

There are **20 New Testament** mentions of the Devil or Evil One.

These verses speak to this reality: **Spiritual warfare** is a normative part of the Christian life.

We aren't called to be cavalier about evil. Our enemy certainly exists.

And we're called to stand firm, be strong, and resist. In Peter's letter to the church he says:

1 Peter 5:8 – *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.*

He's like a lion. It's a unique descriptive.

Unique because for all the mentions of the enemy in the gospels and epistles, details are limited.

Paul, for instance mentions the evil one in all of his letters outside of his shortest one- Philemon.

Yet Paul never digs into any detail about the powers we face- no classifications, lists, hierarchy.

In fact, it's clear Paul doesn't much care about the powers in and of themselves.

His main goal, emphasis, and focus- the focus we should adopt- is to show us and remind us that they are defeated.

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CS Lewis once said in the intro to his book *Screwtape Letters*:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils.

One is to disbelieve in their existence.

The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

In some circles- as well as the our Western culture at large- we have all but built a mythology around the devil. He's a cartoon image built on Dante's *Inferno*, *Paradise Lost*, and those Frank Peretti novels my parents had around the house. You've got movies like *Constantine*, *The Devil's Advocate*, Schwarzenegger's *End of Days*, and entire TV series like *Lucifer*. Our imaginations run wild.

Any juicy details on the devil are more likely to be urban legends than Biblical.

Because the Bible, for all his mentions doesn't give many details.

Ultimately the Bible says much less about the Devil than some Christians would.

The danger here and with other content in the Bible, is when we dive so deep into the **obscure** that we miss the **obvious** – in this case: he's defeated.

Some folks in the Church would claim to see a devil behind every bush.

They don't mean to always show up late, they just suffer from the spirit of tardiness. Etc...

And as the churchy cliché goes - "**when in doubt, cast it out**"

Paul doesn't discount the fact that the enemy exists and actively works against us.

And neither should we.

But when you credit the Devil for everything you see as bad in your life, you walk in error...

Sometimes what we credit to the Devil... **It's actually GOD.**

The Bible doesn't present to us some form of dualism where good and evil are equals wrestling for humanity. In scripture you'll only find one almighty, supreme being – God.

It's how the prophet Jeremiah could ask the rhetorical question in the book of Lamentations, at the height of Israel's suffering in exile: ***Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has ordained it? Does not the Most High send both calamity and good?***

While the Enemy may be involved in events in our lives, trying to sow lies and distortions and doubts, he shouldn't get all the credit for them.

We see examples of why this is problematic in the greater context of scripture:

- Job - suffers loss after loss and seeming attack after attack, but we see that none of it would have happened outside of God permitting it.
- What held Jesus to the cross wasn't the power or control of any enemy- it was LOVE.

God is in control of all things, yet we often attribute his power and omnipotence to the enemy.

This distortion hurts because:

When we attribute every bad thing that happens to us to the enemy's plans, we begin viewing them negatively instead of something that God is using for his glory and our good to grow us. If we were asked "**what's wrong with the world today?**" we'd probably have a laundry list at arms length to rattle off. About those people and those policies and those beliefs...

A newspaper once sent out an inquiry to famous authors, including GK Chesterton, asking the question, "*What's wrong with the world today?*"

Chesterton's reply? "**Dear Sir, I am.** Signed G.K. Chesterton."

When asked what's wrong we often point fingers and look out the window instead of looking in the mirror. Yet the source of so much of what we suffer and endure that we never give credit to: **My flesh.**

In Col 2 the cause for Christ's death isn't tied to the enemy, but our sinful nature, our flesh.

Colossians 2:13 [AMP]

you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh (worldliness, manner of life)

Do you know why it's so tempting to look for demons behind every bush?

Because they can prove quite useful for excusing our sin and "manner of life."

What's responsible for this pain? Not me. Not my depravity. It's something else entirely.

In the 70s the comedian Flip Wilson made "**The Devil made me do it.**" a national catchphrase, and at times we take it and run with it.

Another way we get carried away –

We talked about last week how we live in a groaning world subject to decay. Yet when we suffer a couple consecutive crummy moments we chalk it up to "**an attack,**" as if we shouldn't expect such in a fallen world.

Our preoccupation with the devil attacking us individually with a demon behind every bush is the churchy version of having 'haters.' In our culture everyone is convinced they have haters. It's another way we place ourselves at the center of the universe and its conflict.

What's the harm we see here?

An over-emphasis on the enemy allows us to over-value ourselves.

Satan works through half truths, distortions of truth, and flat out lies: one of his lies that we take the bait on again and again: **I'm good. I don't need to change.**

If we can push responsibility to the enemy we can dodge confession and repentance and ultimately we won't change. This is why the New Testament doesn't encourage these thoughts and hands us the full truth:

The bad news is you're far worse than you thought. **Colossians 2:13? You are dead.**

The good news is Jesus, while we were still sinners, died for us and crushed the power of sin.

It's why when Paul makes 20 mentions of the enemy in his letters, there are really only 2 reasons:

- 1.) To remind us that he is defeated
- 2.) To remind us not to fall victim to his schemes and strongholds, to be hurt by half truths.

When we walk in fear or fascination with the enemy we see multiple ways we're carried away: First we see attention is diverted from God to the enemy, and what we credit to the enemy becomes a negative instead of something God can use.

Second, attention is shifted from myself to the enemy, and I can push responsibility from my own flesh to the enemy, avoiding confession, accountability and change.

But the hurt caused by this half truth that I want to focus on from here because it cripples the Church and it's calling: we lose our courage.

Raj's full name is **Shivraj**. He was named by his mother at birth.

Shivraj means "Lord Shiva"- a deity in the Hindu religion of untamed love and destruction.

There are adoptive parents who have adopted from India that have told us we are 100% insane for keeping that name. That we're leaving a foothold for the enemy.

We might as well roll out a red carpet for sin and deviancy. That we'll derail our son's destiny.

This is exactly what happens when we credit the enemy for too much and see him behind every bush. Fear takes over. And in our attempts to live SACRED and set apart we live SCARED.

We treat sin and evil like cooties. But like the "girls have cooties" theory, when we mature we see that's not how it works.

Evil doesn't take ground by osmosis.

Sin and evil isn't a contagious disease. It's a conscious decision.

Yes there is evil.

Yes its defeated.

Yes we can give it a foothold in our lives.

But we do that through active sin and rebelling against God, not osmosis.

When we treat sin and evil like cooties, we run from any and everything that we think could contaminate us.

Being "set apart" and "separate" are both Biblical ideas.

But they become distorted if we miss their true meaning and adopt escapism.

There's two big problems. First- when we separate ourselves from the world, we forget that we take the root of the problem with us: ME.

The Russian author **Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn** once said:

"If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being."

A mark of Christian maturity is understanding what the Bible means when it talks about being **SEPARATE and SET APART**.

In Jesus' prayer in John 17 he prays for the Church:

Sanctify them in the truth [set them apart for Your purposes, make them holy]; Your word is truth. Just as You commissioned and sent Me into the world, I also have commissioned and sent them (believers) into the world. For their sake I sanctify Myself [to do Your will], so that they also may be sanctified [set apart, dedicated, made holy] in [Your] truth."

We are set apart for a reason: God's purposes for us.

What's his purpose for us? It's pretty explicit in these verses and Jesus's prayer and Jesus' life – our purpose is to be commissioned and sent into the world. To make contact and make disciples.

When the Bible talks about being “set apart” & “separate” it’s not about our physical position, but our spiritual condition – the condition of our heart.

Difference doesn't demand distance.

We are to live both set apart and sent.

Jesus shows us the proper practice of separation is about being separate from **sin**, not **people**.

Too often we point to the culture as the source of sin – movies, music, alcohol, and alike.

We're in for a rude awakening if we think sin is caused by something outside of us instead of inside of us.

James 1:14 says:

“each of you is tempted when you are dragged away by your own evil desire and enticed.”

The root cause of sin in our lives isn't an external pull but an internal push.

The enemy uses external things to exploit this internal push. Hence the value of convictions, accountability, values, and guardrails. But ultimately the problem lies within.

The Bible says enough about the Devil so the world won't be convinced he doesn't exist

But the Bible speaks of the Devil not so we can debate the details and become consumed by of fearful of what we don't know.

It reminds us of the two things we should know:

- 1.) *He's defeated*
- 2.) *his remaining weapon is half truths and deception.*

He can't rely on strength, so he relies on deception. Distortions. Half truths.

Our chief fear shouldn't be possession, but what half truths are in our possession?

We aren't called to isolate ourselves, but infiltrate the world...

We aren't called to flee from the first sign of evil, we're called to reclaim what the enemy has taken.

We're called to resist the devil, not run from him.
When we do, he's the one that flees.
It's what James says Satan does when we resist.
It's what he did in the desert after tempting Jesus.

Unlike the first Adam who bought his deceptions and fell, Jesus didn't buy his distortions of scripture. He pushed onward, all the way to the cross.

The result?

The one damning, condemning weapon that the enemy had was stripped from him – unforgiven sin. Jesus takes the penalty of our sinful nature, and the sins of our flesh.

If the enemy has been holding that against you- your brokenness...

And if he's used it to keep you from Christ. Whether its coming for the first time or returning...
Know that Christ stripped him of his power.

Come.

Don't wait to change to come. Come and BE changed.

Give up fear and timidity for:

POWER – to understand that the power available to us in the Holy Spirit isn't some power to work magic and escape difficulty.

It is the power for godly living in an evil world- being a light in dark places.

LOVE – to boldly step into moments with people who think and live differently than us, not fearing sin by osmosis, but walking in genuine LOVE.

DISCIPLINE – saying yes to the Spirit and learning to say no to our flesh and its habits of sin.