Introduction: Two competing agendas

“Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through Me (Jesus) will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.”

John 10:9-10 NLT

- God’s Agenda = LIFE → Unstoppable!
- Satan’s Agenda = DEATH → Diabolical!

“Diabolical” – Extremely wicked or cruel, evil, fiendish, heinous, hellish, vile, vicious, satanic, infernal, demonic, despicable, deplorable.

(Webster’s, Wiktionary)

- What would rank as diabolical in your list of evils?

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Precepts to remember *

1. Good and evil are realities, not merely concepts or metaphors. Matthew 4

2. God is the source of all good; Satan, the author of evil. James 1, Genesis 3

3. Satan is a fallen angel who led 1/3 of the angels in a rebellion against God. Ezekiel 28, Isaiah 14

4. We are in an “invisible war” with temporal and eternal consequences. Ephesians 6

5. We face a formidable, but defeated foe. Colossians 2:15

6. We fight from victory, not for victory. 1 John 4:4

7. Ignorance of his tactics is lethal. 2 Corinthians 11:3-14

Perceptions to challenge

1. Two common errors – C.S. Lewis

2. Our view of “diabolical” vs. God’s

3. A lesson from “The Screwtape Letters”

*A complete study of spiritual warfare is available in the book, Small Group DVD, or audio series, The Invisible War by Chip Ingram. Available at www.LivingontheEdge.org*
Agenda #1: Divide and Conquer
Acts 6

A pattern to recognize
Acts 6

- The Context – RAPID growth/change.

- The Complaint – UNMET needs.

- The Core - differences are fertile ground for DIVISION when growth/change creates real or perceived unmet needs.

- The Cure – “New wine demands new wineskins.” - Jesus

Principles to practice at the first sign of disunity
Acts 6

1. Don’t be DEFENSIVE; listen objectively. Acts 6:1

2. Get to the CORE ISSUE; refuse to blame. Acts 6:2

3. Seek outside HELP; the “3rd” alternative. Acts 6:3

4. Be FLEXIBLE; accept that roles and priorities will always change, in healthy, growing environments. Acts 6:4

5. Refuse to FEAR; change means “different,” not wrong. Acts 6:5-7

6. BEWARE; our perceived loss of “control/power” makes us vulnerable to divisive words and/or behavior. Acts 6:8-15
A prayer to ponder

11b “Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name—the name You gave Me—so that they may be one as We are One. . .  

15 My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. . .  

20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message,  

21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.  

22 I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are One.  

23 I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.”

John 17:11b, 15, 20-23 (NIV)

Personal Application and Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. Is there a person or group that you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from, to answer Jesus’ prayer for unity?

2. Have you subconsciously allowed “differences” in personality, gender, culture, spiritual background, or ethnicity to put up barriers in relationships or make you feel superior to those not like you?

3. In view of this prayer by Jesus, is “division and disunity” diabolical in God’s eyes?

4. Could our acceptance of “moderate disunity” explain the lack of power and impact the church has in your geographical area?

5. Will you pray this week for Christ’s unity within the Church, your family, and relationships?
Introduction: Sometimes, what we’re used to isn’t always right!

✓ “The earth is flat.”

✓ “The Bible must remain in Greek, Hebrew, or Latin.”

✓ “Cigarettes make you cool.”

✓ “Suntans make you healthy.”

Tradition – “an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or social custom)” – “the passing down of elements of a culture from generation to generation; especially by oral communication.”

(Webster’s)

Thesis: Traditions are not wrong, but they are dangerous!

Traditions are the highway by which we pass on the values and principles that matter most; unfortunately, over time, the means (traditions) we practice to remember those values/truths can take precedence over the truths themselves.

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Satan’s Agenda:

To separate the truth from the tradition so deceptively that sincere people would diabolically “hold to a form of godliness, but deny its power.”

A case study – Acts 7

- The Scene - Stephen seized and accused. Acts 6:8-15

- The Accusations -
  - Blasphemy against God and Moses
  - Speaking against the Holy Place – The Temple
  - Speaking against the Law of Moses

- The Historical Setting - The Jews in Jesus’ day had come to venerate and worship the LAND (Palestine), the LAW (given by Moses), and the TEMPLE (unique location) more than the purpose of the land, law, and temple.

- Stephen’s Defense - He challenges the “status quo” tradition concerning the land, the law, and the temple with the TRUTH that demands faith, radical change, and following God’s promised deliverer and Messiah JESUS.

- Stephen’s Defense Hinges on Three Timeless Truths:
  1. God’s agenda has always been based on His PROMISES, which necessitates progression and CHANGE.
  2. God’s BLESSINGS and purpose have never been restricted to Palestine, the Temple, or the Jewish people.
  3. God’s people have historically and repeatedly REJECTED God’s man (prophets) and God’s plan (deliverance).
Stephen’s Message: Truth vs Tradition

Acts 7:1-8

**Abraham**
- Location: Mesopotamia
- Promise: Land and DESCENDANTS
- Focus: To bless all nations
- Faith means… TO LEAVE

Acts 7:9-16

**Joseph**
- Location: Egypt
- Promise: A dream and a position
- Focus: Joseph’s rejection and God’s DELIVERANCE
- Faith means… ENDURING

Acts 7:17-43

**Moses**
- Location: Midian
- Promise: You will DELIVER My people
- Focus: God’s Law given and rejected
- Faith means… RETURNING

Acts 7:44-50

**Joshua**
- Location: Wilderness
- Promise: Victory over enemies
- Focus: Tabernacle’s purpose, temple’s limitations (Isaiah 66:1-6)
- Faith means… FIGHT TRADITION

Acts 7:51-59

**Jesus**
- Location: Our Hearts
- Promise: Eternal life, DELIVERANCE from sin and death, fulfillment of the Law
- Focus: Rejection and killing of Jesus Messiah
- Faith means… NOT COMPROMISING THE TRUTH

**Summary** = You received the law (tradition), but did not obey it (truth).
Diabolical: Satan’s Agenda for Planet Earth… including You! (Part 2)

Lessons from Stephen’s life and message:

1. Truth demands **TRANSFORMATION.**
   
   *James 1:22-25*

2. The basis of God’s blessings is relational, not ritual.
   
   *Matthew 15:1-20*

3. Perverted traditions must be **EXPOSED** and abandoned.
   
   *Acts 7*

4. Truth-bearer’s refuse to accept the **STATUS QUO** in their life, their relationships, and their sphere of influence.

Application Questions for Personal and Small Group Use:

1. What positive traditions have helped you experience and walk intimately with Christ?

2. What “status quo” issues need to be evaluated in your life and relationships? How have they subtly thwarted your growth?

3. How specifically can you focus on God’s promise for your life and walk by faith? Who or what is holding you back?

4. What habits aren’t wrong, but are unprofitable for your spiritual growth and development?

5. Is there a situation that needs you to be a truth bearer? How can you do it with humility and gentleness?
Introduction: When subtlety doesn’t work

The Warning

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

1 Peter 5:8-9 (NIV)

Intimidation – “to make fearful, to compel or deter by acts or threats, to terrorize – causing alarm, fright, or dread with the apprehension of violence, injury or death. To induce fear through a sense of inferiority; to bully, or cow resulting in a broken spirit and loss of courage.”

(Webster’s)

Isolation – “to set apart from others; to cut off, separate, seclude.”

(Webster’s)

The Promise

“And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power forever and ever. Amen.”

1 Peter 5:10-11 (NIV)
God’s answer to intimidation and isolation:  

- **The Context** - Stephen martyred

- **The Result** - Persecution and Dispersion

  - Satan’s strategy to **DESTROY** through **INTIMIDATION** and isolation.
  
  - God’s purpose to **DEPLOY** through **SUFFERING** and proclamation.

  - **The Truth** - Sometimes our worst times are God’s best times to use our lives.

  - **Application** – Fear not! **PREACH** the Word!  

The Confrontation: Good vs. Evil  

- Simon intimidates through demonic sorcery.

- Philip liberates through God’s Word.

- **The Truth** - The power is in the **MESSAGE**, not the messenger.

- **Application** - Fear not! Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

  1 John 4:4
The Warning: Genuine vs. Counterfeit Faith
Acts 8:18-25

- **The Truth** – Intellectual ascent and external ritual does not constitute **GENUINE** faith.

- **Application** – Fear not! Settle the issue **TODAY**.

The Scope: God’s plan unfolding
Acts 8:26-40

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
Acts 1:8 (NIV)

- Philip obeys a **PROMPTING** by the Holy Spirit.

- God had **PREPARED** a heart to hear.

- **The Truth** - God is sovereignly working in the lives of people all around you, all the time.

- **Application** - Fear Not! **BOLDLY** share the Gospel every day, in every way.

❖ **Summary** = The Matthew 28:20 Principle
Application Questions for Personal and Small Group Use:

1. How aware are you that you are in a spiritual battle? What present difficulty might be a hidden opportunity to share Christ?

2. How has fear/intimidation kept you from boldly sharing Christ’s love and message with others?

3. What new insight did you receive concerning how difficulty and suffering, even persecution, can be used by God to fulfill His plans?

4. Which of the four applications have “your name on it” to apply?

5. Who could you share your “next step” application with, to gain support and encouragement to follow God’s plan for your life?
**Introduction:** Death by lethal religion

- The Rationale

- The Process

- The Parallels

**Religion** – “to acquire a deep conviction of the validity of a religious belief or practice.”

Root – old French/Latin – religio – to fear the supernatural; religārē – to tie up, to bind (state of a life bound by vows)

(Webster’s)

**Jesus’ Commentary on Religion – Matthew 23**

**Question** –

What is the difference between dead religion and a living relationship with God?
Pharisee – Clean

Focus = Death

Subject = Murderer

Jesus = Rebukes

Eyes = Blinded

Becomes An Invalid

“Get Up” – “Go where I will tell what you must do.”

Healed = To carry His message to the Gentiles

Healed = By the name of Jesus

“All Lydda comes to see what Jesus has

Invalid Begins to Walk

Eyes = Opened

Jesus = Resurrects

Subject = Doer of good works

Focus = Life

Tanner – Unclean

Dead Religion vs. Living Relationship
Acts 9 – A Study in Contrasts

Religion results in control, fear and DEATH!

Conversion

Acts 9:20-22

100% Called to Mission

Relationship results in power, love and LIFE!
Lessons we must learn about religion:

1. Religion focuses on **ACCEPTANCE** from the outside-in; life occurs from the inside-out.

2. Religion is rooted in **PERFORMANCE**, life is rooted in **GRACE**.

3. Sincerity and **DEVOTION** are no substitute for truth.

4. Religion is easy to spot in others and nearly **INVISIBLE** to ourselves.

5. It is God’s **MERCY** that rocks our world to reveal our **RELIGION** and birth a fresh **NEW LIFE**.

Application Questions for Personal and Small Group Use:

1. Where have you seen religion bring death in others? In yourself?

2. Read Matthew 23 and discuss Jesus’ commentary on religion.

3. Where has religious thinking crept into your life?

4. What specific action do you sense God leading you to take?
Introduction: Operation “Insulation”

- We are all born into a cultural BIAS.

- Apart from interaction outside “our group,” we grow up assuming “our view” accurately defines reality.

- Generations of socialization and INDOCTRINATION create barriers at best and hatred at worst with those who are different from ourselves.

- Internal inaccurate assessment (pride) and external inaccurate assessment (prejudice) result in the fulfillment of Satan’s agenda – to kill, steal, and destroy.

Pride – “a high or inordinate opinion of one’s own dignity, importance, merit, or superiority, whether as cherished in the mind or as displayed in behavior.”

(Webster’s)

Prejudice – (1) : “preconceived judgment or opinion (2) : an adverse opinion or learning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge.”

:“an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics.”

(Webster’s)

The Problem: Prejudice creates walls between individuals and groups so the Gospel cannot move from one group to another.
The Context – Historically and culturally

The Story – The GOSPEL smashes hundreds of years of prejudice and hatred through an enlisted soldier and fisherman.

How did it happen?

- Cornelius’ vision  Acts 10:1-8
- Peter’s vision  Acts 10:9-16
- Messengers arrive in Joppa  Acts 10:17-23a
- Peter’s reception by Cornelius  Acts 10:23b-33
- Peter’s sermon  Acts 10:34-43
- Gentiles “grafted” into the Church  Acts 10:44-48
How to break the power of prejudice:

1. God is working in places and among people we assume He doesn’t. Acts 10:1-8

   **Practice** = **ASSUME** God is speaking to everyone, everywhere and wants to use you.

2. Prayer is a **prerequisite** to seeing others differently than our cultural bias. Acts 10:9-16

   **Practice** = **ASK** God to let you see others the way He does.

3. Walls of prejudice often come down a few **bricks** at a time. Acts 10:17-23

   **Practice** = Take a **SMALL** step this week to connect with someone much different than yourself.

4. Obedience to God often **alienates** us from “our group” and is the **price tag** to take the good news across cultures. Acts 10:23b-33

   **Practice** = Choose to **PLEASE** God, not men.

5. The “good news” of the Gospel is for **all** people, of **all** backgrounds, in **all** places. Acts 10:34-43

   **Practice** = **SHARE** the difference Jesus has made in your life with someone this week.

6. God refuses to allow Himself or His **ways** to be put in a box. Acts 10:44-48

   **Practice** = **REFUSE** to assume that God will work in others the same way He’s worked in your life.
Application Questions for Personal and Small Group Use:

1. Why do we all have some measure of prejudice toward others – even if we don’t realize it?

2. How have you seen or experienced prejudice affect people negatively?

3. Which of the six principles/practices covered in this message spoke to you today? Why?

4. Who or what group (kind of people) do you find yourself pre-judging?

5. This week, how could you “let the walls fall down?” (i.e. pray for them, get around and understand them, share a meal, ask questions, ask for forgiveness)

6. How will our inter-generational, inter-racial, and inter-socio-economic unity and love impact our geographical area according to Jesus? John 13:34-35