

Watch Out for the Devil Because He is Out to Get You *I Peter 5:8-9*

Have you sometimes felt that everything in life seems to go wrong even though you are doing everything right? It's almost like some invisible force is affecting us in ways we do not understand. That's how Charleen and I felt when we moved into a new house in Eden Prairie during one of Minnesota's coldest days in January. We were exhausted from the move but pleased to have a new home; but when we went to bed that night it was in a very cold master bedroom. We piled on clothes and blankets but nothing was enough. In the morning we could see our breath and we were pretty sure something was wrong.

Because it was a new house the builder was very helpful. He checked the windows and caulking. A furnace expert made sure the furnace was working correctly and a ventilation expert made sure the vents weren't blocked and the system worked properly. It all checked out fine, but our bedroom was still unlivable. We closed almost every register in the house except the ones in the master bedroom. The furnace ran constantly. The rest of the house was toasty but we could still see our breath in our bedroom.

I insisted the builder tear open the walls and ceiling to measure the insulation. He finally agreed and the sheetrock was cut. There was no insulation in that end of the house! Our guess is that the insulation subcontractor left one day

before completing that end of the house and the next day the sheetrock subcontractor closed up the remaining areas. No one realized what had happened. When the room was insulated the temperature shot up into the nineties until all the rest of the registers were opened and the system was balanced back to the way it should be.

Life can often be a lot like this. We desperately try to fix everything visible but there are things going on that we cannot see that are making our lives cold and miserable. It is one of the

last topics addressed by Peter in the next to the last of his 20 principles for successful living in tough times. He is talking about how unseen Satan tries to wreck our everyday lives. Peter's principle is to watch out for the devil because he is out to get you! It's found in 1 Peter 5:8-9:

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.

This is either very important supernatural advice or quaint superstition from a primitive first century culture. Do you believe there really is a devil? Do you think there is actually a real person who is the ultimate expression of evil?

Belief in the devil was shrinking in America until the events of September 11, 2001, helped to improve Satan's rating in the polls. It seems that when the economy is strong and life is peaceful we discount the devil as something like the Tooth Fairy or Santa Claus. But, when life goes poorly and we are scared the devil seems real after all.

Of course, the Gallop Poll is not what determines the reality of Satan. He is either real or he is a myth. Well, the Bible teaches that Satan is real,

personal, powerful and very, very bad.

Let's take a quick theology lesson about Satan. We need to understand first of all that "Satan" and the "Devil" are different names for the same person. Actually, he is a multi-faceted personality with lots of names. "Satan" means "adversary" because he is the opponent of God and of God's people. "Devil" means "the accuser; the slanderer" because he is constantly trying to put-down God and God's people with awful accusations and malicious indictments.

Every Christian is a soldier in the battle against evil. We must take this seriously.

We know very little about the origins of Satan. He was already alive, powerful and evil when the first stories of the Bible were reported out of the Garden of Eden. The Bible assumes the existence of Satan more than it explains the existence of Satan.

From various places elsewhere in the Bible theologians have concluded that Satan once was a high-ranking angel in heaven who became proud and rebellious, turned against God and was kicked out of heaven. God's faithful servant became God's archenemy. Legions of angels defected with Satan and became known as demons. When God created the universe, earth and humanity our planet became a primary battleground between good and evil, between angels and demons, between God and Satan. We are all caught up in the war whether we like it or not.

Satan is powerful and evil, but Satan is not God's equal. Some people underestimate the devil. They fail to take him seriously. They think of him as a cartoon character with red leotards, horns and a pitchfork. But we must recognize that he has formidable supernatural power. He is a competitor of God. He can perform miracles, create empires, trigger epidemics and shape human lives. We humans are no match for such a strong and supernatural adversary.

Some people overestimate Satan. They think he is the evil equal of God and that God and Satan have equal power and parallel attributes. In their minds the difference is not in greatness but in morality. This is simply not true. God is the creator; Satan is a creature. God is eternal; Satan had a beginning in time. God knows everything (omniscience); Satan is smart but limited. God is everywhere (omnipresent); Satan cannot be more than one place at one time. If he's in Africa or Afghanistan right now he can't also be in Akron or Albuquerque.

Satan is doomed. His ultimate destiny is determined. The battle against God is fierce, but God will win. The fatal blow against sin and Satan was struck when Jesus died on the cross and rose to life again. Satan can't top that! Jesus released the salvation and resurrection power of God that in-

flicted a fatal wound to Satan. The last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, details how God will win the final victory that will last forever. Satan apparently doesn't believe the Bible's prediction and still thinks he has a chance to win. Or, he is determined to take down as many people as possible with him in his defeat, just like an army fighting unit that hears the war is over but keeps on killing the victors. The ultimate outcome may be assured but it is still a bloody war for those still under attack.

On the basis of this understanding of Satan Peter writes his advice in 1 Peter 5:8-9:

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 suffering.

Every Christian is a soldier in the battle against evil. We must take this seriously. There are no places to hide, no vacations, no deferments or exemptions from the conflict. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor, young or old, scared or complacent. Everybody is involved in this.

Since we know the spiritual battle is real, get ready in advance. Don't wait until it's too late. Begin now to "*be self-controlled and alert.*" In other words, be constantly on guard.

The United States government has established a Department of Homeland Security. Tens of thousands of employees and billions of dollars are devoted to preparation against future terrorist attacks. There are levels of alert and calls for the entire population to be on guard. The government regularly tells us that there will be terrorist attacks; they are inevitable. They cannot be stopped but we should do everything possible to be ready.

Peter is telling us that Satan is a terrorist. He is out to get us. He doesn't play fair. He is clever and mean. Our best weapon against his terrorism is to be prepared in advance.

A practical example of this biblical principle is Internet pornography. Pornography is nothing new. It is known throughout all of recorded history. Archaeologists have uncovered lots of ex-

amples from Pompeii and other ancient cities and cultures. In our generation there has been a rapid and unprecedented expansion through printing, film and television; however, the Internet has brought inexpensive accessibility and privacy as never before.

Statistics on Internet pornography are amazing. Not only are millions pursuing it but sites are also aggressively pursuing Internet subscribers. What begins as curiosity has become insidious and destructive for millions of Americans. Time is consumed, obsessions are fed, relationships are destroyed, marriages are undermined and Satan smiles in victory. I doubt that anyone who started surfing Internet pornography sites ever expected this beginning to lead to job loss, spiritual defeat or marital divorce,. It has enormous personal and social effects.

So what's a Christian supposed to do? We're to be *"self-controlled and alert."* And what might that look like? Well, avoid the sites. Put your computer in a public part of your house. Buy software to block pornography sites. Ask someone to hold you accountable. Get counseling. Maybe even get rid of your computer. Do whatever needs to be done. *"Be self controlled and alert."* Get ready in advance.

Each of us is vulnerable in different ways and Satan customizes his strategy and his tactics to fit us in our point of vulnerability. So, it is up to us to get ready in advance. The best strategy is generally to keep our guard high and specifically exercise self-control in areas where we know we are most vulnerable. It's up to us.

While the first strategy is to be personally prepared, the second strategy is to watch out for the devil's direct attacks. The instructions of 1 Peter 5:8-9 continue with these words: *"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*

Take the devil seriously. That doesn't mean Satan is individually giving us attention, but he does have a host of demons that are bright and powerful and are waiting to trap us. Probably the worst thing we can do is succumb to the tempta-

tion to trivialize our enemy. That's what happens with cartoons of the devil in red leotards with horns on his head and a pitchfork in his hand. Jokes about the devil seem to make Satan manageable.

Understand that Satan and his devils are on a human hunt, seeking to attack and destroy vulnerable people. They have a vast arsenal to adapt to every situation. The bait may be money, pride, sex or power, but rarely is the bait rotten or ugly. Satan and his devils are skilled hunters.

The Bible recommends that we fight back with faith. Again in 1 Peter 5:8-9 we are advised, *"Resist him, standing firm in the faith . . ."* Never surrender! Fight hard. God will not abandon us in the battle but we will need to fight. When a Satanic attack comes, dig in. Stand firm and fight back. Never think that a small surrender will get the devil off your back. For every inch he gains he will try to gain an entire mile.

Jesus showed us how to resist and stand firm. Two New Testament biographies of Jesus, in Matthew 4 and Luke 4, tell about Satan directly chasing down Jesus to try and trick him into sin. Satan didn't assign Jesus to an assistant demon the way he is most likely to do with us. He took Jesus as his personal assignment. He offered Jesus satisfaction for his physical hunger. He offered Jesus power. He used his best weapons. But Jesus

was prepared and alert. He realized Satan's approach was not an opportunity but rather a trick. He was prepared to resist every evil offer by using direct quotes from the Bible.

What does this tell us to do? Be ready before the assault comes. Get into spiritual shape in advance because it can get rough. Know the Bible well enough to have an answer ready before a demonic offer comes. Read the Bible; memorize key statements. Pray regularly. Get into good spiritual shape. Be on guard against a deal that is too good to be true. Fight back. *"Resist him, standing firm in the faith."*

This raises a practical question: Do we recognize an attack from Satan when it comes?

The Holy Spirit lives in every Christian. He is far greater and stronger than Satan or any enemy that is in the world.

Maybe, but probably not! Generally, it seems it's not in Satan's best interest to be identified. Most terrorists use fake identification and Satan comes at us in disguises, using fake ID. So, we must constantly be on guard against every deception that he uses.

Although all this is true, our lives are not to be centered on Satan. We should not see a demon behind every bush and blame every specific problem of life on the devil. There are plenty of problems in the world and we have enough personal inclination to sin that we can mess up our lives without the devil's help. Some people may be off Satan's short list because they are sufficiently self-destructive all by themselves.

The best defense against evil is a good life. We need to be more pro-God than we are anti-Satan. Be on guard? Yes! Be Satan-centered? Never!

Peter adds one last piece of advice about Satan-caused suffering. It is to remember that we are not alone. *“Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”*

When our lives are caught in suffering, difficulty, pain, adversity or other problems it is very common to think we are alone in our suffering, but we are not. The spiritual battle against evil is everywhere and assaults everyone.

Recently I met a couple from Vancouver Island in British Columbia. During dinner we started asking each other about our children. They said they had three children but quickly added that their son had died thirteen years ago when he was nine years old. While delivering newspapers he was hit by a car and died eighteen hours later.

They shared about the loss, the pain and the questions. They talked about hearing other Christians report answers to prayer for their children and recalled that they prayed for their boy to live

and he died. During the year after their son's death they went to Pakistan for three months of missionary service. There they told others about the loss of their son and found that almost every family had lost a child to death. It had an amazing impact them, their perspective and their grief to encounter others who had lost sons in the spiritual warfare against evil and Satan. I think it increased their faith and strengthened their resolve to *“Resist (Satan), standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”*

All these warnings against Satan and his terrorist network of demons may be frightening to some but there is very good news. The good news is that we belong to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit lives in every Christian. He is far greater and stronger than Satan or any enemy that is in the world. We have every resource we need for victory against Satan and evil because we have Jesus Christ as our Lord. St. Paul writes in Romans 8:31-32 and 37-39:

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

No. in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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