

Battling our Enemy

1 Peter 5:8-9

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Our series in 1 Peter brought us last week to 5:8-9 and the reality that we have an enemy; an ancient and powerful enemy who hates us with malice more intense than any human hate. He never sleeps. He knows us better than we know ourselves. His intelligence is far greater than ours. He is second only to God in power and authority. He has a huge and powerful army. He or one of his associates is lurking nearby. Their presence is no doubt right here in this room.

Peter calls him a lion. He is also called Apollyon, Dragon, Beelzebub, Serpent, Ruler of this world, Tempter, Slanderer, Antichrist, Power of Darkness, and the Devil. His ancient name was Lucifer, but his personal name now is Satan.

As we learned last week, Satan is a created angel who was given more beauty and authority and power than any other spiritual being but God himself. Ezekiel and Isaiah describe how this glorious angel became God's enemy when his beauty led him to pride and he aspired to the glorious status reserved for God alone. Satan conspired with a third of the angelic host in this rebellion. God judged Satan and threw him out of heaven to this world. We live in his house.

All unredeemed humanity belongs to him. Death is his ultimate weapon and his mission is to defame God and take as many people as possible to hell with him forever.

This should lead us to ask, *if he is that powerful, how can a Christian overcome him?* Most of us just try to make it through the day, much less battle the sworn enemy of God in the process. Peter has something to say and so does the rest of Scripture. In this message I will try to explain what Scripture says through the broad categories of what Peter says.

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." (1 Peter 5:8-9 ESV)

Peter gives four ways we can do battle with our spiritual enemy. Be sober-minded, be watchful, resist him, and know that others are also suffering. The last one is certainly the encouragement to know that we are not alone in this struggle. To know others are suffering is the comradery felt in every hospital's cancer ward. It encourages you to see others struggling as well. Every Christian struggles against the enemy. The other three here fit more clearly the broader witness of Scripture on spiritual warfare.

Be Sober-Minded

To be sober is the opposite of being intoxicated or drunk. It means to be clear-headed. Why is that important? The enemy is so dangerous that only a fool would not take him seriously. Maybe you've seen videos where a crowd has gathered for entertainment, like in a bull fight stadium. Everyone's laughing and carrying on with frivolity, when suddenly, the bull jumps into the stands. Now everyone's screaming. Now everyone is sober-minded.

One of Satan's best techniques is to lull the Christian into a silly, light-hearted approach to their spiritual life. To live like there is no danger. To parent your children like there's no danger. To skip spiritual disciplines and prayer like there is no danger. To live close to worldly values like there is no danger. It's fine. Like the Joker's famous line, "Why so serious?"¹ Because the sworn enemy of God is way more serious than we are and prowling around your life seeking to devour you. This battle will take grim determination to win.

Here are some practical helps with this:

Being sober-minded avoids two unbiblical extremes. One is to ignore him and not give any thought to him at all. The other is to obsess over him, believing there's a demon behind every bush, every hangnail, every time your car doesn't start. We don't obsess. We are sober-minded.

Say a daily prayer for help to overcome the enemy. Isn't this what Jesus taught us? "*When you pray...pray then like this... lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*" (Matthew 6:7, 9, 13) Jesus apparently thought evil was so pervasive and dangerous that we should pray for God's help in deliverance.

Avoid hanging out with Christians who aren't serious about their spiritual life. I think there is a kind of self-righteous seriousness and I'm not talking about being boorish. But there are many, many people for whom their Christianity is just a causal thing. Their approach to Christianity is light-hearted. I would encourage you to be sober-minded and forge relationships with others who are as well. Then their iron can sharpen your iron.

Be Watchful

The most dangerous lion is the one you can't see. Be watchful. Look for the lion. By this I mean to see the world through the grid of spiritual warfare. Do you believe there is a spiritual war and the battleground is your soul or not? Really?

We must be on alert. Satan is a master of disguise, but he cannot disguise the effect of his influence. When a church goes through a devastating split, what do you see? Or when a brother or sister falls into a devastating sin, what do you see? Or when you are in a severe temptation and you feel that inner conflict between what is right and wrong, what do you see happening? Remind yourself, *I am fighting an enemy and the power of this temptation tells me this is not from God.* You may not see the lion, but you can smell him. Take him seriously. Who here today is not listening to what I am saying and one year from now your life will be devastated by the enemy?

I'll just quickly add another. Being watchful also means seeing the world around us through this lens. When you see a cultural influence or influencer aligning with Satan's purposes in the world, see this for what it is. Satan wants to defame God's glory, so anything intended to glorify God will be attacked. Why do cultures from Greece, to Rome, to our Western civilization always follow the same path? Order to disorder. Should we be surprised that an institution like marriage, ordained by God for his glory and good, would be attacked? Or gender identity? Or sexuality and purity being twisted into the version we see in popular culture today? See the lion. See his effect. Identify his tactics. They haven't changed. Be watchful.

¹ *The Dark Knight*. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Perf. Heath Ledger. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2008. Film.

Resist Him

Our best weapon against Satan, and the one repeated more than any other, is to resist him. Satan is a bully. How do you stop a bully? You resist him.

- "Resist him, firm in your faith." (1 Peter 5:9)
- "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7)

This feels a little like the dad telling his son to stand up to the bully on the playground. OK, but how do I do it? Let's ask Scripture. *God how do we resist Satan?*

Understand Satan's strategies

"So that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs." (2 Corinthians 2:11) Satan employs the same tried and true methods that he has honed over the centuries. One writer (Bevington) summarizes them as *deception, temptation, and accusation*.²

Deception/Mind

Satan is not omniscient. He doesn't know everything. He also can't read our thoughts. But for thousands of years he has studied human behavior so that he knows exactly the deception most suited and most likely to cause us to fall.

Let me do a quick tangent. I don't want anyone to think the only reason we sin is because of Satan. The reason we sin is because we are sinners and God never allows the causality of sin to be an excuse for sin. If there was no Satan in the world today, we would still sin. It is our nature to sin. Theologians categorize the ***influences to sin as the world, the flesh, and the devil***.

The *world* is "*human nature apart from God*." (Beeke).³ It is the constant cultural call away from living for God's glory and purpose. If all we had was our sin nature and no Satan, we would continue to sin.

The *flesh* is an inner impulse we all have toward sin. This is what I see in my daughter when we tell her to do something she doesn't want to do; you can see the spiritual wheels turning inside her. She struggles. She was born with a sin nature. We all have it. If there was no devil, our flesh would drive us to sin.

Here is the unique thing about the third influence, *Satan*. Satan is the master of using the other two against us. Genesis calls him "crafty." Satan manipulates the incredible power of our sin nature and the world's influence to cause us to sin. So, if we struggle with greed, he will seek to deceive us using that weakness against us. If we struggle with sexual lust, he will use that weakness against us. Pick your sinful inclination; Satan has a deception ready.

He doesn't control our minds, but he does the bait and switch to perfection. He typically does this by placing something desirous before us but hiding the consequences. Like a good fishing bait. It's a sparkle hiding a hook. Or he tempts us with a small sin knowing he opens the door to a greater one.

² Bob Bevington, *Good News About Satan: a Gospel Look at Spiritual Warfare*, p. 33.

³ Joel Beeke, *Fighting Satan*, page unknown.

Again, think of what he did with Eve. He made eating so desirous with the promise of moral and spiritual enlightenment. What did he hide? Death. Consequence. He gave Adam an apple and took away paradise. Take a moment and think of an example in your life. A sin you've succumbed to where something desirable blinded you to the terrible consequence.

Temptation/Desires

"But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." (James 1:14)

Satan uses our sin nature against us by placing before us an opportunity to satisfy a desire, maybe even a good desire, but to do so out of God's will. A drive down the interstate or five minutes of Internet surfing proves the point. Did God give us sexual desire? Yes. Is it good within his will? Yes. Is the human body beautiful? Yes. Did God make us, men especially, to desire the female body? Yes. Is it good and holy within marriage? Yes. Did God devote a whole book of the Bible to it? Yes. Then why is the interstate filled with pictures of other men's future wives with their clothes mostly off? Satan is a parasite. He can't make anything beautiful, but he can use the good and the beautiful to tempt us to gratify a holy desire in an unholy way.

We must understand how he operates. This is true in every possible desire. Financial security. Love. Friendship. Food. Authority. Family. Health. You pick any desire, Satan has a sinful temptation to suit it.

Accusation/Conscience

Satan is called the Accuser of the Brethren. He is especially good at defeating Christians by keeping them from fully accepting the finished work of Jesus and applying it to our conscience. We remain in bondage to our past. We wallow in our failures. We refuse to believe God can forgive us. We disbelieve the grace of God. We never have a new chapter because we perpetually live in the failure of the current one. We fail to fulfill the words of one of our favorite songs, *"When Satan tempts me to despair/ and tells me of the guilt within/ Upward I look and see him there/ who made an end to all my sin."*⁴

How many of us remain in the old life of despair because we listen to Satan and refuse to believe that there is new life in Christ?

Fight Satan's tactics with spiritual weapons

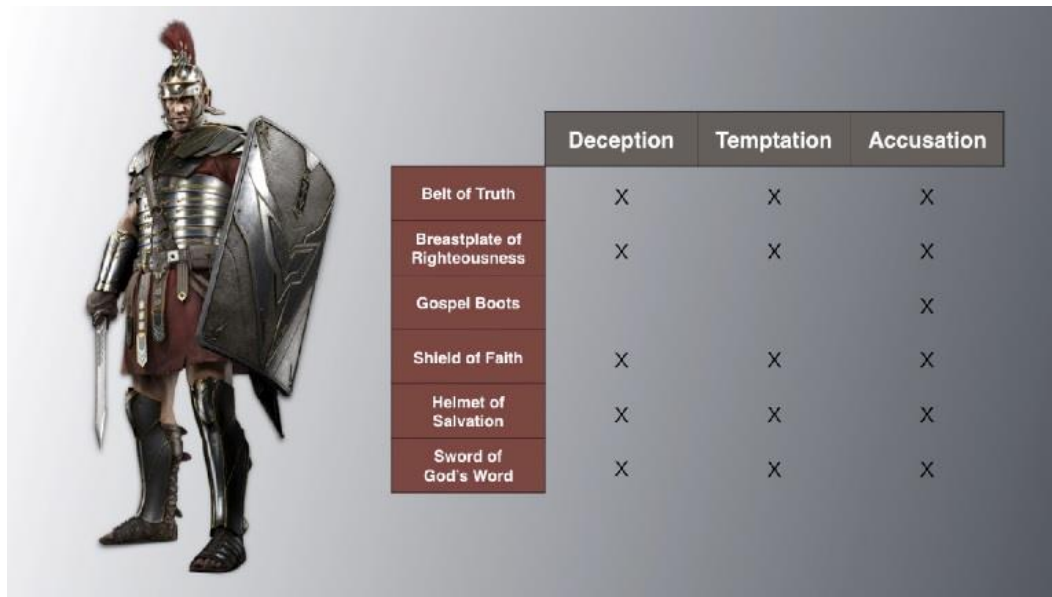
If deceiving, tempting, and accusing is how Satan operates, how do we resist him? The Apostle Paul gives the clearest teaching on our weaponry for spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6.

"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and

⁴ Charitie L. Bancroft, "Before the Throne of God Above," 1863.

supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.” (Ephesians 6:13–18)

Paul’s repeated admonition is to “*stand firm.*” That’s a good description of “*resist.*” Time doesn’t allow much exposition here. I simply want you to see how our weapons against Satan are perfectly suited for Satan’s weapons against us. The “*full armor*” means a heavily armed soldier. A soldier bristling with weaponry. Don’t neglect any weapon we have. Be fully armed.



We fight Satan’s lies (which often have little bits of truth in them) with God’s truth. The truth of God as seen in the Word of God and revealed in the Son of God. Nothing exposes a liar more than the truth. To quote one famous cultural line, *Satan can’t handle the truth.*

The Full Armor of God

Breastplate of righteousness – This could mean our righteousness in Jesus through justification, or the integrity of life that flows from it. Either way, the breastplate protected the vital organs. The righteousness of Christ that is ours protects our core from the fiery darts.

Gospel boots – This one is a little obscure, but best to see it metaphorically that a soldier’s boots give him a firm stance; allow him to go into enemy territory. We stand on the gospel and take enemy territory (walking boots) by proclaiming it.

Shield of Faith – Peter says, “*Resist him, firm in your faith.*” (1 Peter 5:9) How? Faith appropriates God’s promises into everyday life. It believes God is good and trustworthy. Satan always questions that. So, faith extinguishes Satan’s fiery arrows by not giving them any fuel. It refuses to believe his lie. It believes God’s way is better and more satisfying than Satan’s temptation. It chooses to believe God rather than Satan’s accusation.

Helmet of Salvation – The helmet protected the head from a battering axe or sword strike. We take the enemy’s blows to our head protected by our assurance of God’s saving work in our life. We are confident in our ultimate victory. It acts as a protection.

Sword of the Word of God – Our only offensive weapon is God’s Word and applying God’s Word to the very temptation. Even Jesus did this in his wilderness temptation. The most powerful temptations ever experienced were the three Satan put before Jesus. In each case, Jesus resisted Satan by quoting Scripture against him. What do you do when you are facing a temptation? Too often we simply take a deep breath and hope it goes away. Try quoting Scripture. This assumes we know some. Here are some good ones, dear flock:

- *"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."* (1 John 4:4)
- *"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"* (Romans 8:32)
- *"Do not love the world or the things in the world."* (1 John 2:15)
- *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind."* (Luke 10:27)
- *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4:13)

I can’t talk on this subject without mentioning a Christian classic on this subject. Thomas Brooks wrote *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*. It’s a definitive book. To give you as much ammunition as I can, I only have time to summarize Brooks’ remedies.⁵ He gives ten:

1. *Walk by the rule of Scripture*
2. *Don’t grieve the Holy Spirit*
3. *Pursue heavenly wisdom*
4. *Resist Satan’s first overtures immediately*
5. *Strive to be filled with the Spirit*
6. *Remain humble*
7. *Maintain a strong and constant watch*
8. *Maintain communion with God*
9. *Fight Satan in Christ’s strength, not your own*
10. *Pray much*

We are all in this battle together. Some of us have been on the sidelines too long. Some of us are casualties in the hospital. Some of us took our wounds this week and we are bleeding on the battlefield. For all of us, we must remember that our only victory in this battle is fighting with the power of Jesus’ victory over Satan on the cross. There was the victory. We are involved in the final skirmishes awaiting the return of the King who will finally crush Satan and punish him forever in hell. Fight on, my dear church.

*"Since we are so weak in ourselves that we cannot stand a moment; and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, cease not to assault us, preserve and strengthen us by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes till at last we obtain a complete victory."*⁶

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⁵ Thomas Brooks as quoted by Joel Beeke, *Fighting Satan*, p. 92.

⁶ *Heidelberg Catechism*, Question 127, 1563.