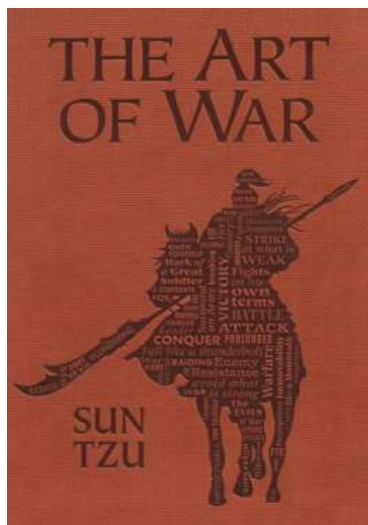


Have you ever heard of Sun Tzu? About 500 years before Christ, he wrote a book about military strategy called "THE ART OF WAR". It's still used today to train soldiers and military leaders. This isn't a study on Sun Tzu or his book "THE ART OF WAR", but I'd like to set the tone of this Bible study by framing it with a quote from Sun Tzu's book...



"If you know the enemy and yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained, you will also suffer a defeat. But if you know neither yourself nor your enemy, you will succumb to every battle. - THE ART OF WAR

For this study, I want to dig into the concept of knowing our enemy. As followers of Christ, I think we do a pretty good job of knowing who we are in Christ, but the same can't be

said about knowing our enemy. The fact is, we're in a war. It's being fought right here, right now at this very moment. The battle rages inside the heart and mind of every person alive, and the war rages all around us in an unseen realm. Whether it's the front lines of an individual's mind or the supernatural battlefield of angels and demons, the repercussions of the spiritual war can be felt in every aspect of our existence.

Ephesians 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.



There's a lot to learn about those principalities and powers and rulers of darkness, and this study will touch on that a little, but they need their own study.

Realize that our enemy isn't one that we can fight with physical weapons, even if the enemy shows up in the flesh. This war must be fought with spiritual warfare, because we're battling against spiritual beings that hide behind flesh and blood. But God has given us the weapons to resist the enemy. He has prepared us an arsenal for every situation we face. But before we learn about God's arsenal for us, it's important to learn more about our enemy.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:



Peter says that our enemy is like a lion on the prowl. I once watched a documentary about lions. In it, they followed a pride of lions as it hunted. It was really interesting. Once the pride spotted a herd of gazelles, they would divide up.

KNOW OUR ENEMY

One group would go to an area where they could hide and lie in wait while the other group would make their way to an area where they could easily be detected by smell and sight.

This group of lions would creep and prowl as close to the herd as possible and try to remain undetectable, even though they were in the detectable position.

Once the herd of gazelles noticed these prowling lions, they would sound the alarm, and the creeping lions would pounce.

At first it was total chaos. Gazelles scrambling this way and lions zig zagging that way. But as the hunt went on, you started to see a pattern. The lions would charge a group of 5 or 6 gazelles hoping to make one slip or stumble, and if the group stayed together and none stumbled, the lions would move on to a different group because they aren't fast enough to catch a gazelle. But if a group split apart and there were 2 or 3 stragglers, the lions would join together in pushing these stragglers toward the area where the other group of lions was still hiding and waiting. Once the divided gazelles ran into the waiting ambush, it was over for them.

These lions caused Division

They caused Distraction

They caused Deception

And finally, they caused Destruction.

They divided their prey from the rest of the herd, then confused the prey with all kinds of distractions, trying to stumble one up. They deceived the prey by creating the illusion that it was choosing the path of escape, when in fact, the lions pushed the prey into an ambush. And sadly, the final result of this assault was that the prey was destroyed.

Satan uses the same tactics on us. He uses pride to divide us by certain beliefs and denominations, and by certain traditions and opinions.

He uses chaos to distract us by causing all kinds of things to happen in our lives at once, so we get confused and easily fall to temptation.

He uses illusion to deceive us by making us believe we have the situation under control or by playing on our compassion and using it against us.

And his end goal is to lead us into destruction.

Another aspect or characteristic of the enemy for us to be aware of is their serpent nature. Notice I said "their" not just his. We are at war with a kingdom, not a single individual. The dragon is their ruler, but never forget, they are legion because they are many. And they are all snakes.

Psalm 140:1-5 Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men; Preserve me from violent men,
2 Who plan evil things in their hearts; They continually gather together for war. 3 They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; The poison of asps is under their lips. Selah 4 Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; Preserve me from violent men, Who have purposed to make my steps stumble. 5 The proud have hidden a snare for me, and cords; They have spread a net by the wayside; They have set traps for me. Selah



David is comparing the wicked to serpents in these verses. There are 2 types of serpents in this world.

Serpents that kill by venom and serpents that kill by constriction. As you know, the venomous snakes inject venom into their prey, which corrupts and destroys every cell it encounters. The constricting snakes squeeze the life out of their prey until so much pressure is applied that even the heart is unable to beat.

Now, there's a lot in both of those that we can spiritually apply to the world around us, so I encourage you to meditate on that, but for this study I'd like to point out how David describes the tactics of these wicked people. Snakes don't work together to set traps. They don't actively work to stumble up their prey. These tactics line up more with how a PRIDE of lions hunt. So why is David blending these two concepts? Well, there's a reason.

Psalm 58:3-6 *The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. 4 **Their poison is like the poison of a serpent**; They are like the deaf cobra that stops its ear, 5 Which will not heed the voice of charmers, Charming ever so skillfully. 6 Break their teeth in their mouth, O God! **Break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!***

Psalm 91:9-13 *Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place, 10 No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; 11 **For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. 12 In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone. 13 **You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.*****

By the way, those highlighted verses are what satan quotes when he tempts Christ in the wilderness and says, "it is written".

How ironic that he was quoting a verse that prophesied his own destruction, and he was quoting it to the ONE that will eventually destroy him. It gives a new depth of understanding when we consider Christ's reply to him, "it is written again, you shall not tempt the Lord your God".

The Bible has many examples of blending the concept of lions and serpents together. The reason is that these unclean spiritual beings that control the wicked, these demons, have certain aspects that are comparable to lions and serpents. I don't know what they look like physically, but based on how the Bible describes them, I'm persuaded to think that spiritually they look a certain way. Have you ever wondered what a creature that was a blend of a snake and lion would look like? I think it might look something like this...

Revelation 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.



This verse teaches us that the dragon and his angels are here on earth. That means the war in heaven has moved to Earth. That also means that the dark influence of these fallen angels is felt here.

That's why we can see that influence in the world around us. Without getting too deep into the hierarchy of the kingdom of darkness, God's Word makes a distinction between different kinds of wicked spiritual beings. There are those that drive men insane, because they themselves are insane. There are those that feed the flesh, because like a lion, they desire flesh themselves. And there are those that deceive and manipulate. These types are like serpents, and they usually attach themselves to people who have opened themselves up to witchcraft and sorcery. The Hebrew word for serpent is NACHASH, so that's what I'll call them.

These NACHASH spirits aren't just attempting to divide and distract us with the sins that are common to mankind, lust... greed... envy and the like. More seriously, they are attempting to destroy us by injecting THE BODY with the

venom of deception and by stopping our love for the Truth by constricting our growth in the Truth.

While this influence and these tactics have certainly increased in power and frequency, this is nothing new. The Bible records a few examples for us to learn from so we know how to respond when we encounter this NACHASH influence.

Acts 13:6-11 *Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, ⁷ who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? ¹¹ And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time."*

I'd like to focus not on who this guy Elymas was, but what he was. He was a sorcerer and false prophet. That means not only did this guy practice witchcraft, he also claimed to be a mouthpiece for YHWH. He placed himself in a position to be a spiritual adviser for this guy Sergius. Obviously Sergius was seeking Truth because he called for Paul and Barnabas to come speak with him about the Gospel. But Elymas didn't want any of that. See, because of his dabbling with the darkness, Elymas had a NACHASH attached to him. And that NACHASH is exactly who Paul addressed when he said, "you son of the devil, you enemy of righteousness".

And Elymas went blind. That serpent couldn't spy through the eyes of this deceitful man any longer. Because of Paul's response to this NACHASH influence, Sergius became a believer and Elymas falls through the cracks of history. Paul fought this fight spiritually. He didn't hit Elymas with a 3-piece combo. He didn't slam his back out and go crazy on him. He allowed Holy Spirit to guide him, and he spoke directly to that NACHASH with nothing but the TRUTH.

This is a lesson in offense. First and foremost, lean on the Holy Spirit AND speak the truth directly to that unholy spirit that's hiding in the shadows. Now let's look at another example that had a different outcome.

Acts 8:9-13 *But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, ¹⁰ to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." ¹¹ And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. ¹³ Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.*

So far, so good. Sure, this guy has a past, and I'll be the first to tell you that people with a past can change. Even people who have been in the darkness can come to the light. This guy is known as Simon Magus or Simon the magician. He was well known back then for performing demonic magic and he had this encounter that changed his mind. But did it change his heart? Let's continue reading...

Acts 8:18-24 *And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. ²² Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." ²⁴ Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."*

In these verses Simon has exposed himself. Maybe he really did have a change of mind about his past, but he didn't have a change of heart, so when that NACHASH spirit saw the apostles performing miracles, it raised up its head like a cobra and desired to have that power through Simon Magus. But it made a mistake and failed to recognize the true source of the power, which is God the Holy Spirit. Then Simon Peter addresses and rebukes him. And that's where Peter made a mistake.

Notice it doesn't say Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit at this time. Instead, he was filled with anger. Instead of addressing and confronting the spirit attached to Simon Magus, he confronted the man. He rebuked and cursed the man, but not the NACHASH. We can see it in his last few statements. He says "Repent and ask God for forgiveness". That seems like compassion shining through Peter's anger. But demons don't repent and they don't ask God for forgiveness. Notice

Simon's response, - "You pray to God for me". That says a whole lot and I want you to think about what that implies.

So why didn't Peter directly address the serpent hiding in this sorcerer? Peter is one of my favorite Biblical personalities. I relate to him a lot. But one of Peter's biggest issues was reacting with emotion instead of responding with wisdom. He was rightfully enraged by what Simon Magus attempted to do. I can't tell you definitively why he didn't address the nachash, but I have an idea. Put yourself in Simon Peter's sandals for a minute.

You know that you struggle with anger, and you know you're trying to be better when suddenly, you have this encounter with this man who doesn't seem right. You sense there's something wrong inside of him, something poisonous and venomous. But you don't want to be too quick to judge, because that's what you've struggled with in the past. And although you sense this thing and know you're about to address the issue, you don't necessarily trust your emotions on how to address the matter and besides, this guy was just baptized a little while ago, so you don't want to push him away from Christ.

Before you can ask the Holy Spirit for guidance, you begin your rebuke by cursing him and his money. You feel your anger rising so you reel your emotions back in and offer as much compassion as you can muster to avoid chopping this guy's ear off. You tell him "Repent and ask God for forgiveness". Because of this inner struggle with anger and trying your best to represent the Kingdom of God, you fail to recognize the NACHASH lurking in the shadows of this man's heart, and because of that, you inadvertently offer it a way out.

Now, why is all this important? Because, although this is the last time Simon Magus shows up in the Bible, this not the last time he shows up in history. Because the serpent spirit in this man wasn't confronted, it went on to lead the man into even greater depths of darkness. He's known as the founder of Gnosticism. Basically, he created an entire false Christianity that combines Babylonian mystery religion, paganism, and Christianity. His followers are the creators of the Gnostic gospels and have been responsible for leading believers away from the Truth for 2000 years. Simon Magus even showed up in Rome and started a Gnostic "church" there. A church that may or may not have grown giant and eventually held captive the True Bride of Christ, with him as its first "father". He's also known as "the Father of Heresies" and many demonic cults and groups can trace their teachings right back to him.

This is a lesson in defense. When we encounter this serpent influence in people, before we “go to war”, we need to pray for Holy Spirit to guide us and fill us, and then we need to directly confront the serpent, not the man.

In closing, I’d like to end on a positive note, so we’ll look at some verses that help us understand the beginning of God’s armory for us.

Proverbs 9:10 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

1 Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

Solomon teaches us that reverence for God is where wisdom starts and that understanding comes from seeking knowledge of Him. Wisdom

Knowledge, and Understanding aren’t physical, but they are spiritual and mental. Notice the phrases weapons of warfare and arm yourselves. Peter and Paul both knew this was war and they took it very seriously. They also knew that for us, the battle is fought in the mind. That’s where the enemy attacks us the most. And they both had experience in dealing with the enemy. This teaches us that the most important lesson in learning the art of spiritual war is our relationship with our Creator and our determination to seek His wisdom. While it’s important to know our enemy, it’s even more important to know our God. AMEN