

Facing Up to the Devil **Ephesians 6:10-17**

6:10 "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one, Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, our fellow warrior, strengthening us to overcome Satan, the arch-enemy of all that is God's. This morning's text may seem strange, perhaps outrageous, to men and women of the scientific, twentieth century. It sounds a little strange to me. I like to read "Science News," "Discover," and "Scientific American." The unexplainable can be explained; the mysterious has been penetrated. The philosophy of Dr. Isaac Asimov has predominated for many people; that is, given enough time all the mysteries of the universe will yield their secrets to science. God has died; Satan is a myth, and evil can be eradicated with money and good intentions.

However, not all mysteries have surrendered themselves to science. Many remain, some of them mere superstitions, but others fearful and despairing of rational explanation. We have experienced a resurgence in the occult and Satanic. Several years ago "Time" magazine explored the explanation for evil in the world. Many people consider the devil "in." Just ask Freddy Krueger or Jason of "Nightmare on Elm Street," or "Friday the Thirteenth," parts one through "ad nauseam." During the late twentieth century, we paid money to scare ourselves with movies such as "Poltergeist," "The Exorcist," and "Omen." Several years ago a teenager in Waterbury, CT, pleaded "not guilty" to murder because of demon possession. Many witnesses came forward to verify his story.

Some people consider the devil a silly, pathetic spirit dressed in red long-johns. Other people invoke Satan to acquire the power to accomplish their diabolical plans. Most people, including Christians, have profound ignorance of the devil. We do not consider it very modern to put credence in a personal devil. The preacher must consider all these views among his hearers. Yet the preacher has an overriding goal that our text emphasizes in verse 13. We must permit God's Spirit to enable us to "take the whole armor of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

I. Do not underestimate the Devil.

Before resisting the devil we must become aware of two equally disastrous mistakes. I would like to examine both of these in turn; the first is underestimating the devil, and the second is overestimating him. C.S. Lewis describes this dilemma in his book, "The Screwtape Letters,"

written during the Second World War. Mr. Lewis described the situation like this

We underestimate Satan when we relegate him either to myth or bogey-man status or give him a humorous, bungling character. However, a quick search of Scripture should convince us of Satan's reality and his influence in the world. Satan has the effrontery to enter God's domain and tempt our first parents. Subsequently, intoxicated with the wine of initial victory, he tempted the Son of God himself.

Painfully, we realize what happened when Satan confronted our first parents. He did not overcome them by force. Instead, he subtly tempted them using the weapons of lie and deceit. He effected our parents' downfall through their disobedience. They made the decision that has cursed us all. Satan led Adam and Eve to question the source of their strength, the Word of God.

Much later Satan came to the second Adam, Jesus, in the wilderness. God had decided to give his fallen creation a second chance through His Son. The Bible calls Jesus the second Adam. During this encounter, Satan felt bold enough to forego his disguise and face Jesus directly. Perhaps Satan assumed that the Son of God would easily see through any disguise. In any event, Satan's weapons remained the same - lies, deceit, trickery. Fortunately, the second Adam successfully resisted.

Satan faces us every day. His weapons vary from encounter to encounter. We dare not underestimate his reality, nearness, or strength. He sits right next to you in the pew and stands right next to me in the pulpit. Dr. Martin Luther wrote, "A Christian should know that he is sitting among devils and the devil is closer to him than his coat or shirt."

Scripture gives the devil different names, but they mean the same thing. His names indicate his function in relation to us. Sometimes the Bible labels the devil Satan, which means "Accuser." In this instance, the devil works by displaying all our sins to us. Consequently, he convinces us that God could never love or forgive such despicable people. The devil's other function seems to be one of an adversary or prosecutor in the courtroom. He functions in this manner in the book of Job. He argues before God that we do not serve God faithfully and should be abandoned. We do not deserve God's mercy. Satan underestimates God's grace and forgiveness.

Satan's influence pervades the "atmosphere." Either he or one of his servants accompanies us always. We may consider him the primary source of hate, war, bigotry, prejudice, and so forth. He manifests himself most boldly in demon possession, but how many of us can admit that we have witnessed a bona fide case of possession? Nobody here, I hope! Instead, we need to become aware of the "invisible pollutants" of demonic influence in literature, in the arts, in science, in our daily lives. When morals break down, when what was wrong suddenly becomes acceptable, even the norm, we had better suspect Satan. Be forewarned! Do not limit Satan to one tiny place or influence; he does not keep such boundaries.

II. Do not overestimate the devil.

After a rather lengthy exploration of the power of Satan, we might be tempted to surrender and allow him to have his way. However, this brings us to the second mistake we must avoid. Do not overestimate the devil. He may have more power and influence than we do, but he is not all-knowing, or even eternal.

Devils are angels who rebelled against God and He expelled them. Thus, they are a part of the created order. They have their limits, severe limits in comparison to God Almighty. We waste our time trying to ascertain why God permitted a portion of his creation to become so evil. Scripture simply reveals that it happened and warns us to avoid the devil.

These rebellious angels oppose God and all that he has created. God confirmed them in their rebelliousness; God gave them over eternally to the condition they chose for themselves. They shall remain in this condition for eternity. In one sense, the devil and his minions cannot even think for themselves. They profoundly hate what God loves, is, and does.

Despite their great number, power and hatred, the devils have undergone judgment. They cannot escape. They have been condemned irreversibly to the unquenchable fires of hell. Once banished to this place on the Day of the Lord, they will never be able to leave. Christ sealed their doom with his death on the cross and his resurrection.

We must each recognize Satan's power and limitations. He possesses more power and cunning than we do, but he is not omniscient or omnipotent. Scripture reveals several examples of the devil's defeats. He rebelled against God. God banished Satan from heaven. He tempted Christ and never once made a direct threat. Scripture states, 1 Corinthians 10:13, that God put limits on Satan's power, ". . . God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able"

Consequently, we can make several practical applications of these facts. We do not have to give in to Satan. Years ago the comedian Flip Wilson generated laughter when his character Geraldine protested, "The devil made me do it, Honey." The devil cannot make us do anything. He cannot invade the body or soul of a believer who has been filled with the Spirit of God. However, Satan can lie to us, deceive us, and lead us to question what we know to be correct. The devil can poke holes in our faulty judgment and entice our sinful flesh. However, the final responsibility for all our sins and shortcomings rests with ourselves. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "For each one shall bear his load." Give the devil his due, but not too much!

III. Stand up to the Devil!

In our text for this morning, Paul exhorts us to stand up to the devil! Paul warns us about the evil day which may come to any of us. Perhaps it will come many times when God's love, care, mercy, and even his existence are called into question by Satan. Despite the witness of the Holy Spirit within us, we may be tempted to deny our faith. We all stand on shaky ground; none of us is temptation-proof. Adam and Eve took the bait; Jesus did not. Unlike Adam and Eve, and like Jesus, Paul exhorts us to put on the full armor of God. Paul uses the imagery of the Roman hoplite. These heavily armed foot soldiers comprised the bulk of the feared Roman army. They marched into battle with their leather armor and short swords and

made Rome the preeminent empire for centuries.

Start dressing for the evil day immediately. Arm yourselves like the Roman hoplites. Start by girding yourselves with the truth. The devil tries to persuade us with lies and half-truths. Christ called Satan the "Father of lies" (Jn. 8:44). Satan has become a master at using lies, his most potent weapon. He triumphed over Adam and Eve by skillfully using lies. He remarked, "God knows that if you eat . . . you will be like God." The devil's last attack against Jesus was likewise a lie. "All this I will give to you if you will fall down and worship me."

The devil still lies to us. He attempts to convince us that he can give us peace and happiness, that Jesus could not possibly cover all our sins, and that the true intellectual does not require a God. We have one defense against these lies, God's truth. The basic truth upon which we stand is: "You shall worship the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind."

The armor of the Roman hoplite had very few weak places. It protected the foot soldier as much as possible. So we too must completely cover ourselves in the armor of God. On the evil day put on the breastplate of righteousness. We must realize that our puny attempts at self-righteousness are insufficient, that we cannot save ourselves. Therefore, we also may fall victim to the devil's subtle question, "Yea, hath God said?" Our righteousness is a gift that we have not earned but has been freely given to us. It is an alien righteousness; it comes from outside us, but God reckons it to us through faith.

The breastplate covers the cleansed heart. God has washed us clean from our sins in the blood of the Lamb. He has blotted out our transgressions. He places Christ's righteousness upon us so that it fits like it was tailor-made. Therefore, we can stand firm and respond to Satan, "Yea, God hath said so."

On the evil day, let your feet be shod with the Gospel of peace. We do not think about our feet much; we take them for granted. However, they are critical to our ability to stand and walk. Feet proved crucial to the soldier who had to march leagues on foot and then stood or charged into battle. What if Satan hurls all his evil forces at you in one bold frontal attack? Can you stand? Certainly, but not if you stand alone. If you do stand alone you will be overwhelmed and carried away into enemy territory.

In such an event as this, we need an ally. We have the very best in God. He has reconciled us to himself through our Savior. The Gospel of peace declares this to us. Throughout history armies that have fought two front wars have often suffered defeat. We no longer fight a two-front war. We have peace with God and he has become our ally. Without this Gospel and its peace, our feet would not stand for one moment or go forward against Satan.

Hold tight to the shield of faith. We cannot defeat temptations with plastic crosses or plastic religion. The old horror movies showed the hero vanquishing the evil vampire by holding up a cross. It seemed to make little difference what the cross-waver believed. However, in the face of our temptations waving a cross in front of them will not work. The faith behind the cross must be real, and the meaning of the cross must be understood.

Faith in Christ stands between us and temptation. Faith in Christ means that we trust in Christ and know he has decisively defeated Satan. We turn to Christ when we experience temptation. Our flesh may desire to surrender but our spirits desire to serve Christ. Thus with the shield of faith, we can deflect Satan's flaming darts and say with Christ, "Get behind me Satan."

On the evil day of temptation put on the helmet of salvation. Especially in times of trial, we may question our salvation. When persecution, disappointment, and misfortune overwhelm us we may be tempted to wonder if Satan somehow has managed to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. By ourselves, alone and friendless in a hostile world, we question the validity and truth of receiving eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, and peace. At times like this, we must look beyond what we think to what God "thinks of us." He receives us as his redeemed children for Christ's sake, and as fellow heirs of his riches with Christ.

On the evil day take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. This is the one offensive weapon we have in our arsenal. Using the sword of the Spirit we can carry the battle to the Devil. God's word exposes Satan's lies. God's word strengthens the fainthearted and gives hope to the hopeless. God's word defeats Satan at every turn. God's word is eternal; Satan is not. God's word is truth; Satan is the father of lies. God's word is almighty; Satan is circumscribed. God's word is the weapon, nothing more and nothing less, that Jesus used to defeat Satan. Martin Luther wrote in his famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress," "Tho' devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill, They shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still Scowl as fierce as he will, He can harm us none, He's judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him" (vs 3).

We have a very formidable enemy in the devil. He wants you and me! Do not underestimate his power, but do not overestimate it either. God has equipped us with his might and protection. He has given us his Gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation. Stand, therefore, in Christ your mighty victor! Amen!

May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Sola Dei Gloria!