

"The Enemy and His Strategy"

My Scripture text today is a verse from 2 Corinthians, where the Apostle Paul refers to Satan, and then says, "For we are not unaware of his schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11). In one of my older Bibles I have underlined this verse, then written in the margin, "Are we?" Are we aware of Satan's tactics? Are we in the church aware of his schemes?

The Bible says that there is a devil, and that he is an enemy who's out to destroy us. Sometimes people – even in the church – laugh at the idea of a devil. But it's ironic that while some people in the church dismiss the notion of a devil, many outside the church talk of Satan, the occult, demons, witchcraft. A slew of movies have been made dealing with the devil or the demonic: *American Satan, Bedazzled, Damien: Omen II, The Exorcist, Highway to Hell, Little Nicky, Rosemary's Baby, The Unholy*, and many others.

Every so often we hear of grisly accounts of Satanic rituals or atrocities. A pair of Satan cultists murdered a Montana social worker near Yellowstone Park. They shot him, hacked his body into 6 pieces, then ate his heart. A man named Anton LaVey headed a Church of Satan in San Francisco, and also wrote a Satanic bible. Jayne Mansfield, a movie star and sex symbol of the 1960's was a member of LaVey's church. He said, "Jayne and I were very close." But she was the girl friend of an attorney named Sam Brody. Brody, according to LaVey, the minister of the church, "hated our group." So LaVey put a ritualistic curse on Brody and told him that he would see him dead within a year. And, within a year, Brody was killed in a car crash near New Orleans. Jayne Mansfield was with him, and was decapitated.

Regardless of what any of us may think, Jesus Himself taught that there is a devil, and contended with Him all His life! Jesus called Satan "the prince of this world." He met the devil face to face out in the wilderness as Satan tempted Him (we'll look at this more in a moment).

A cosmic battle is going on every day between good and evil, God and the devil. Ephesians 6:12 says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Satan's overall goal is this: Satan wants to destroy us. Jesus called Satan a *murderer*: "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). Satan wants to kill everything that's good – to destroy the goodness of life God created. Satan wants to destroy **you**.

God sent Jesus to save us, to restore the goodness of life, lost through sin, by His death on the cross. *Satan did his best to keep Jesus from going to the cross!* From the very beginning of His ministry, when Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, until the very end, the devil wanted to keep Jesus from going to the cross. Do you remember, when Jesus told the disciples that He was going to Jerusalem, and that He would be killed, Peter says, "God forbid! This must never happen to you," Jesus says to Peter: "Get behind me, *Satan*" (Matthew 16:23). Satan wants to block and muzzle any preaching about the cross, and to keep people from believing when they hear the gospel story. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the

glory of Christ." In the Parable of the Sower, when the seed of the Word of God is sown, Jesus says Satan is at work to snatch up the seed, so people will not be able to understand the message of the kingdom of God.

Bottom line: Jesus wants to give us life; Satan wants to destroy life, and everything that is good and beautiful.

If we are up against such a powerful enemy of our soul, it makes sense that we ought to educate ourselves about his tactics! Sports teams scout their opponent to understand their methods. Professional teams spend hours and hours looking at tapes of their opponent's game plans, tendencies, weaknesses, strengths. Our one son is a hockey coach for a high school team and also a club team. Before important games he will go to his opponent's games and scout that team. Before tournament games he's even traveled to Pittsburgh to scout the team they will be playing in the tournament.

Erwin Rommel was a World War II German general who wrote a classic book called *Infantry Attacks*. He was a brilliant military strategist, and his battle plans bordered on the genius. It is said that during the war, America's famed general George Patton read Rommel's book in order to better understand how to do battle with the German army.

So what are some of Satan's methods and tactics? One of the best places to find this is in the account of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, when Jesus went eyeball to eyeball with the devil and his tactics.

Satan pounces on our weaknesses. Jesus is absolutely famished from fasting 40 days and 40 nights. Then this happens: "The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread'"(Matthew 4:3). Satan says, "Jesus, you must be famished! Use your miraculous power to make bread out of these stones and feed yourself!"

Satan likes to capitalize on situations where we are in a weakened state. Like, you're really strapped for money, and this opportunity comes up just to cheat a little bit in order to get some extra cash...your marriage has gone sour, you're sad and lonely, and this person at work is paying a lot of attention to you lately. All of us have character flaws, human weaknesses. It might be our temper, love of money, a loose tongue that wants to gossip. Whatever. Satan looks for chances to pounce on these vulnerabilities.

Then, too, Satan is a master at lying and deception. Jesus called him a liar, and the father of lies (John 8:44).

"Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone"' (Matthew 4:5-6). Satan says to Jesus, "If you're really God's Son, jump down off this cliff, because the Scripture says you can do that and God will protect you."

Here, the devil quotes Scripture! But he twists it and distorts what it says. Scripture doesn't promise safety if we deliberately test God, or think God has to act as we demand because we've backed God into a corner.

Satan is an expert at subtlety and deception. He takes what is ugly and makes it look beautiful. He takes what is evil and false and makes it look like the truth. He takes what is irrational and insane and makes it look wise and normal. 2 Corinthians 11:14 tells us, "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."

Satan tries to deceive us, for example, in regards to *truth*. Throughout church history the church has had to deal with false doctrines. Most false doctrines are not 100% weird and off base. They usually have *some truth* mixed in. We see this with *cults* – who have some amount of truth sprinkled in them, but their core beliefs are off base. There are things to admire about Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, and some of their beliefs are in line with historic Christianity, but the kicker is: What do they believe about Jesus?

Satan is a master at deception. Have you ever read *The Screwtape Letters*? It's a classic, written by C. S. Lewis. Satan is working with trainees, trying to teach them how to outsmart the Enemy (Christ), and sidetrack His followers. The book is humorous at points, but profound in its understanding of how the devil will take innocent situations and twist them, distort truth and reality, to skillfully lead people astray. We are not dealing with a celestial nitwit, but an enemy who is clever, wily, slick.

Satan's tactics involve pouncing on our weakness...diverting us with lies and deception...and also ***Satan promises everything, but in the end doesn't deliver!*** Looking again at the story of Jesus' being tempted by the devil in the wilderness: "Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me'" (Matthew 4:8-9). Satan promised Jesus the world if Jesus would only fall down and worship him. But Jesus knew the world was not Satan's to give; it belonged to the Father.

In many ways Satan still promises us the world! Make this move, though it's a bit shady, and you'll find the security you long for. Get back at this person, get even, and you'll finally find some closure. Make a ton of money and you'll be happy. In the long run, Satan never delivers on his promises.

There was a documentary on PBS about a young girl who got into the porn industry. She started out being photographed for erotic magazines, then into films. Eventually she got into hard drugs, and death. They interviewed the photographer who first photographed her. He said how beautiful she was, that such beauty ought not to be concealed. Those photographs were natural and innocent. They honored Mother Nature, glorified God!

Really? Very few people invite others into the dark world of porn by saying, "Why don't you join us and let yourself get sucked into the dead end world of lustful old men.....drugs....."

sexually transmitted diseases.....empty promises and broken dreams. Rather, "Come on, enjoy the glamorous life of wealth and pleasure." *Satan promises everything, but in the end, never delivers what he promises.*

So these are some of Satan's schemes. ***Jesus faced these ploys of the devil and resisted. How can we?*** Well, it isn't easy, is it? Any of us who seriously try to live a pure life in honor of God know we're up against a powerful enemy. But our Savior is much stronger! Here are some closing thoughts.

Be on guard! 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Be alert. Be vigilant. Be on guard. If you found out a lion got loose in your neighborhood, you wouldn't decide to go out for a walk with your dog or your small child, would you? Part of being on guard means not putting ourselves into situations where our weaknesses can be exposed to the devil's temptations.

Submit yourself to God. James 1:17 tells us: "Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Jesus was totally submitted to His Father's will and mission. Keeping focused on our goal of doing God's will in our life and submitting ourselves to Him can be a strong deterrent against the devil's influence.

Put on God's armor. Ephesians 6:11 instructs us: "Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." Since we are in a battle with spiritual forces we need spiritual armor to win this battle. It then lists part of this armor: truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer. *Pray. Get into the Word. Rely on God's power.* Jesus countered Satan's temptations by referring to the Scripture, God's Word.

Don't fight the battle alone. Jesus was not totally alone in the wilderness. The Holy Spirit was there (this Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness). Mark says angels attended Him (Mark 1:13). The "angels" who may minister to us in our battle against evil might be our AA support group, Sunday School class members, our small group, a close friend or relative. Many find that in addition to things like prayer and reading the Word, we need those people in our life who will stand beside us in our times of testing.

The Apostle Paul said, ""For we are not unaware of his schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11). Hopefully, if we can be smart in learning Satan's game plan, we can win the battles!

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