

**“Our Biblical Worldview”
(8) Our dealings with the devil” (part 2)**

Introduction:

Last Lord’s Day we addressed the role of satan in leading Adam and Eve into their sin and then we rehearsed the results of their fall into sin. In his one sin Adam had exchanged his exalted role and position in the kingdom of God to a degraded and servile subject in the kingdom of satan, the kingdom which Adam’s sin had let loose upon the world. Thankfully when people come to repent of their sin and believe on Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, the Lord recovers and restores them, even elevating them beyond what they had lost in Adam. Christians gain back more in Jesus Christ than what they lost through Adam’s fall into sin. Upon conversion God the Father snatches His people out of the kingdom of darkness and translates them into the kingdom of His dear Son (cf. Col. 1:13). Nevertheless, we continue to live in this fallen world, which is the sphere of the devil’s domain. We contend with him continuously as we seek to live for Christ and order our lives according to the rule of Jesus Christ our King.

Now the subject which we addressed last week was largely the manner in which the devil administers his kingdom and perpetuates his ways in this world and among the Lord’s people. We thought that it was appropriate for today that whereas we addressed last week how the devil deals with us, this week we would address how we are to deal with the devil--how we may best equip ourselves first to recognize him and then to withstand him.

Let us begin with the reading of the passage that sets forth the way that we are to prepare for the engagement with the enemy of our souls. Here is Ephesians 6:10-20.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

¹⁴Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— ¹⁹and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

The Holy Spirit had moved the Apostle Paul to pen this glorious epistle to this church, in which he instructed them in the great truths of the Christian faith. Paul had expressed to them his grateful heart toward God for having so wonderfully and powerfully saved them by His grace through Jesus Christ. He declared to them that God had brought them forth from their former state of spiritual death unto their present blessing and enjoyment of spiritual life, promising them eternal life. They were the realization of God’s purposes in Jesus Christ. God had saved them and was forming them into a glorious spiritual temple in which He would dwell and manifest Himself to them and through them to the world. Paul had exhorted them to live in a manner commensurate with their glorious place and position, growing in grace and knowledge of their Savior, growing in love and holiness as the people of God. They were to strive for unity and holiness, even as they lived out their lives through the various relationships in which they found themselves. But here we read that the apostle gave them a final word of warning. He would have them to be on guard and prepared,

for the arch enemy of their souls—the devil—would be coming against them. Paul described the spiritual struggle in which they contended not only with the devil, but with the large forces which he commandeered—principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Christians are to prepare themselves for this warfare. They are to arm themselves for this spiritual battle from which they must come forth victors.

As we read this passage we may fail to see the largeness of scope the apostle was setting before his readers. It is true that the Christians in the city of Ephesus and in that region of Asia Minor in the first century had difficulties and struggles that were unique to them and their time, but the apostle would have them see their spiritual warfare on a much larger scale. They were in an ages-long struggle between God’s people and those who belonged to the devil, or as we set forth last time, between the seed of the woman—the elect—and the seed of the serpent—the reprobate. And even though the Christians at Ephesus were in conflict with the pagans of that city, the war in which they were engaged was cosmic in scope which had waged throughout history. The language in which the apostle described these Christians and their armoury mirrored God’s own preparation and engagement with evil that had been set forth in the Old Testament. Here is a good description of this Old Testament background.

Here the apostle looks at the Christian’s responsibility of living in the world from a broader, that is, cosmic perspective. The moral issues with which he deals are not simply matters of personal preference, as many within our contemporary and postmodern world contend. On the contrary, they are essential elements in a larger struggle between the forces of good and evil. Throughout this paragraph on spiritual warfare Paul’s sustained imagery is drawn from the prophecy of Isaiah, which describes the armour of Yahweh (God) and His Messiah (11:4-5; 59:17; cf. 49:2; 52:7). The Isianic references depict the Lord of hosts as a warrior dressed for battle as He goes forth to vindicate His people. The ‘full armour of God’ which the readers are urged to put on as they engage in a deadly spiritual warfare (v. 11) is Yahweh’s own armor, which He and His Messiah have worn and which is now provided for His people as they engage in battle... Paul uses battle imagery as he calls them to stand firm in the midst of the spiritual warfare that is already in progress.¹

As we look over our passage, we may discern two major divisions. First, there is a call to be armed in order to withstand our true enemy. Secondly, we read that we are to stand firm equipped so as to withstand the assaults of the enemy.

I. The call for Christians to be strong and armed against their spiritual enemy. (Eph. 6:10-13)

Again, we read verses 10 through 13:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Verse 10 opens with the words, “*Finally, my brethren.*” Paul had been addressing various groups within the church, those within the Christian household. He gave instruction to husbands, wives, and children, and he also addressed the relationship of servants to their masters within households. But now he stood back to address them all, giving them final words of instruction and exhortation. He called them, “My brethren.”

Paul exhorted them to “*be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*” He was urging them to be strong in the sense that he is commanding them *to be strengthened by God*, for the verb, “be strong” is in the passive voice. They were to become strong, but to do so, they must be strengthened by the Lord. This

¹ Peter T. O’Brien, **The Letter to the Ephesians** (William B. Eerdmans, 1999). pp. 457f.

would agree with an earlier word of the apostle when he wrote of what he had been praying for to God on their behalf. Ephesians 3:14-16 read,

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of His glory ***He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being***... (Eph. 3:14f, ESV)

We may conclude that this strengthening that we need from God is acquired by us through our praying and trusting God to strengthen us by His grace as we acknowledge our own weakness and inability even while believing in His grace to empower us. Believers do not empower themselves. They are in need of God to strengthen them. The Word of God is urging us as Christians to ask and receive this divine strengthening for the spiritual battle in which we have been thrust. The strength we need is “in the Lord” and the power we need is “His might.” God has provided not only instruction for each of us to stand, but He has made available the grace to enable each of us to stand. One wrote,

The source of this strengthening is described more specifically as *in His mighty power*. This dynamic phrase has already been used in relation to God’s all-powerful strength when He raised Christ from the dead and exalted Him to the place of honour, far above all rule and authority (1:19-20). The apostle prayed that his readers might understand and experience the extraordinary power of God working on their behalf (1:19). Now he calls upon them to appropriate this might, which in the case of Jesus had already proven itself sufficient to overcome powerful, diabolical opposition.²

In verse 10 Paul commanded his Christian readers to be strengthened. In verse 11 he explained why this was absolutely necessary for them. The Holy Spirit through the hand of His apostle commanded that the people of God are to dress in their spiritual armour for they were engaged in a great spiritual battle. **Verse 11** reads, ***“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”*** Paul goes into detail of the various armaments beginning with verses 14ff, but here he commands that they dress or prepare to wage the good warfare. The Christian life, and particularly the Christian ministry is described as “the good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18).

Paul describes satan as a great foe who commands many evil forces. As Christians we are not to limit the identity of our foes as people or problems that we face, physical things and people that we see and have to engage, that are opposed to us and trouble us. There are evil forces and powers behind them which are real and are the true enemies. Paul reasoned, ***“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”***

Now some have attempted to identify these forces to be human institutions such as governmental powers, apostate churches, and corrupt, powerful people in societies, and in our human relationships. They assume that these are the problems with which Christians practically contend and so the apostle must have been referring to them. But this would be to ignore or disregard the biblical world in which Paul lived and served. To hold such an interpretation

fails to do justice to the historical context of the New Testament in which belief in the spiritual realm was widespread, it does not adequately account for explicit statements about these powers in Paul and other New Testament writers, and it is seriously flawed both logically and hermeneutically.³

Paul is not speaking directly of evil and visible human opponents. But on the other hand, as one rightly wrote,

² Ibid, p. 461.

³ Ibid, p. 469.

To reject the *identification* of the powers with human traditions and sociopolitical structures, however, is not to deny that these supernatural intelligences work through such agencies; after all, the New Testament speaks of the whole world lying under the power of the evil and destructive influences to bear on the world and humanity at every level. The evil one works through the events of history, including a visit hindered by him (1 Thess. 2:18), the circumstances surrounding Job's life (Job 1-2), the casting of believers into prison (Rev. 2:10), the inherent distresses of life (cf. Rom. 8:38), and illness which is occasionally due to their demonic activity (Matt. 9:32; 12:22; Luke 9:42), while Christian teachers and their instruction are the subject of attack and distortion by the principalities and powers (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13-15). Heresy is assigned to their activity (1 Tim. 4:1; cf. 1 John 4:1), while according to Colossians 2:20-21 the elemental spirits of the universe made use of the legal demands of the false teacher(s) in order to bring Christians into bondage. Social, political, judicial, and economic structures can be used by satan and his evil authorities to serve their malevolent ends.⁴

Yes, we contend with forces and people that we see and encounter, but the true battle is with the evil powers--the devil and his forces--that control, manipulate, direct and energize them to do his bidding.

The "principalities" and "powers" were mentioned earlier in Ephesians. Paul had written of God the Father, who was at work in Christ,

when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above ***all principality and power*** and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. (Eph. 1:20-21)

And in Ephesians 3:10 Paul had written,

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; ¹⁰ to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church ***to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places***, ¹¹according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord..." (Eph. 3:8-11)

Paul wrote that we wage warfare against satan's forces that include ***"the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."*** These are all spiritual beings who influence and manipulate people and events that transpire on earth with which Christians have to contend. The arena in which we are waging warfare as Christians is not in the cultural realm or the political arena. We are in a struggle against far greater opposition than what they wield. We are wrestling with the spiritual influences and powers that influence and control them. And so, we are engaged in a great battle against the enemy of our souls and all of his forces. It is an intense, difficult, and dangerous engagement, from which we will come forth victors if and when we employ the means that the Lord has provided for His people. We may be assured of this for our Lord Jesus was exalted far above all these opposing forces after He was crucified and raised from the dead and enthroned in heaven. We are victors through Jesus Christ, "who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him" (1 Pet. 3:22).

But if Christians fail to equip themselves with the spiritual "armour", they will not be successful "to stand" against "the wiles of the devil." If they fail to equip themselves rightly and engage the evil one biblically, they will not be able "to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." Yes, the Lord has made provision for His people that they can stand against this spiritual enemy, but the Lord Jesus has not freed His disciples from having to engage the temptations and assaults of satan. The devil assaults us with trouble and temptation because we have turned away from him and his fallen kingdom, having given our souls over to our Lord Jesus, to live and serve in His kingdom. And the devil hates us intensely for doing so.

⁴ Ibid.

Now we might step back from our passage to consider more carefully the nature and manner of the devil's assaults upon the people of God and how we are to recognize and defeat them. We read of the devil's "wiles" or "schemes" which are suggested in several places of the New Testament. Let us consider first,

A. The devil as the tempter

When we reflect upon *the temptation of Jesus by the devil in the wilderness*, we see and learn how the devil attempts to foil us in our efforts to live before the Lord. The devil tempted Jesus in three specific ways. These are paradigmatic (illustrative) of how the devil tempts us.

1. The first temptation

After forty days of fasting in the Judean wilderness, Jesus was tempted by the devil to sin. We read of the first temptation in Matthew 4:3, "*And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.'*" Here the devil is called "the tempter." The devil (and his minions) have the ability to place temptation to sin before us. He knows when we are weak and weary and susceptible. He is able to provide the opportunity to sin. It may seem that he makes everything possible, even easy to sin, and he makes it seem that we can sin and get away with it. We need to be always on guard for "the tempter."

We read that the Lord Jesus responded to the devil by quoting Scripture. Verse 4 reads, "But He answered, 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" First, take note of the manner in which our Lord responded to His temptation and the tempter—Jesus quoted the Word of God. Here our Lord gives us an example of how we are to order our lives. He did not defeat the devil with a burst of divine power overwhelming and overthrowing the devil. Our Lord responded and defeated the devil in His wilderness temptation in the same manner and with the same spiritual weapons that are available to us. He quoted Scripture, purposing to believe and to order His life accordingly.

God's written Word directs how us how God would have us live in the world. The devil would have Jesus live without regard to the Word of God; the devil tempts us similarly. The point is this, we are not to see life through our own desires and wants, our own opinions or reasoning, but rather we are to always ask, "What has God said in His Bible regarding this matter?" We will have little doubt about the will of God for our lives and understanding what God would have us do, if we simply and sincerely ask the question, "What has God written?"

In quoting this verse to the devil our Lord expressed full confidence in His Father to provide for Him in His time of need in His own way. He did not doubt His Father's love or care for Him, nor should we doubt His love and care for us. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). As Christians we are to have the same confidence in our heavenly Father to provide for us as our Lord expressed here when He was hungry and tempted of the devil. But if you are not a Christian, you are on your own; you have no resource to call upon to deliver you.

This temptation respecting the matter of food is somewhat parallel to the first Adam's failure in his temptation in the Garden of Eden. Adam, too, was tempted respecting food. But whereas Jesus was hungry, Adam was not. Adam had every good fruit in the garden readily available to him, yet Adam chose to serve himself by taking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and eating it. Our Lord, the second Adam, endured a far more difficult trial than our first Adam, who had yielded easily and readily. The devil was tempting Jesus to serve Himself, to satisfy His own desires rather than to seek first to do His Father's will. One could say that this first temptation was in the realm of the "the lust of the flesh."

2. The second temptation

In Matthew 4:5 and 6 we read of the second temptation that the devil posed to Jesus.

“Then the devil took Him to the holy city and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶and said 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, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

The devil somehow transported Jesus to Jerusalem and to the temple mount. The pinnacle of the temple is probably a reference to the top of the portico on the south side of the temple mount that was high above the Kidron Valley that lie below the mount. The wall itself was over 100’ high and the valley was many hundreds of feet deep. The first century historian Josephus referred to this place as a “dizzy height.” There the devil challenged Jesus to jump. Perhaps the devil was challenging Jesus to demonstrate the trust that He had just expressed He had in His Father. It is as though the devil were saying, “You say that You trust the Father, prove it by jumping off this temple mount.”

The devil quoted Scripture assuring Jesus that God would not allow Him to perish. In the first temptation, the devil would have Jesus live *apart* from Scripture. In this temptation the devil would have Jesus live according to an *abuse* of Scripture. Many may pass the first test but fail when the second is presented to them. It is amazing what people justify themselves doing as they perhaps quote a text to ease their conscience and justify their decision. But Scripture must not only be used, but it must be used *rightly*.

The devil quoted Psalm 91:11 and 12. *“He will command his angels concerning you”* and *“On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”* What God was promising in this Scripture is that He would guard His own as they walk in the ways that He set before them. It is not a blanket promise of protection regardless of how one lives. Some tempt the devil and tempt God by doing foolish and dangerous things, presuming upon God that He will not allow His own to be harmed. But God does not promise protection to the careless and indifferent, or to those who recklessly place themselves in peril. To live in that manner is to put God to the test, which is sin.

We read our Lord’s response in verse 7, *“Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”* Our Lord answers the devil with another verse--Deuteronomy 6:16. Here we see that our Lord is acting in contrast to the manner that the people of Israel had lived before God. Israel had been an unfaithful Son, putting God to the test. In contrast the Lord Jesus would not so live. He would submit to God and obey Him, not challenge Him. Jesus showed Himself to be the faithful Son of God, fully submissive and compliant to do His Father’s will, not to presume or to challenge His Father in an unjust manner.

And so, in the first test our Lord showed forth that the Scriptures are to be our rule of faith and practice. In the second test Jesus showed that we must interpret Scripture rightly. He uses the proven hermeneutical principle, *“Scripture is its own interpreter”*, or, *“Scripture must interpret Scripture.”* In addition, the first test was in the form of tempting to *distrust* the Father for His provision and keeping. But this second test was a temptation to place *false trust* in the Father, tempting the Father, forcing the Father to do His (Jesus’) bidding.⁵ One could say that this second temptation was with respect to “the pride of life.”

3. The third temptation

We read that the devil would try once more to lead our Lord into sin. We read in **Matthew 4:8** and **9**:

⁸Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹And he said to Him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

The devil could not lead Jesus to disregard Scripture or to twist Scripture, so he would not go there again. Here he offered our Lord power and glory, fame and fortune. I suspect that our Lord could not trust many of us with this kind of temptation, so He sees to it that the devil does not make this available to us. But there may be times that some of us may be tempted to compromise conviction, for we know that if we do so it will

⁵ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Baker Academic, 1973), p. 229.

result in our personal “advancement”, but to fail to do so we know that we will forfeit benefit. But our Lord would be tempted in all points that all of His people would encounter, so this, too, came His way.

We read that “*the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.*” The devil offered Jesus all the power and glory that the world had to offer. He could have regal authority granted by the devil and it could be acquired apart from suffering His cross. The devil has the means to advance his own if he chooses to do so. But the Lord Jesus again responded to the devil by once again rightly quoting and applying Scripture. We read in verse 10, “*Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.”’*” One could say that this third temptation was with respect to “the lust of the eyes.”

We read in 1 John 2:16 that these three temptations are all of the world. John the apostle wrote, “For all that *is* in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world.” The devil uses these three arenas of temptation to trip us up and lead us to think independently of our God and to act irrespective of His Word. He used these three arenas of sin to tempt our Savior and he will similarly do so toward us. This confirms the statement of the epistle to the Hebrews, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb. 4:15). May our Lord enable us to respond to the devil and these temptations in the manner that our Lord Jesus demonstrated for us. The devil has no power over the man or woman who orders life according to His Word.

After considering the devil as our tempter, let us recognize...

B. The devil as the devourer

Peter warned Christians of their need for vigilance regarding the danger that the devil posed to them. We read in 1 Peter 5:8f,

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

The devil seeks to devour Christians, that is to defeat them and to overthrow their faith in Jesus Christ. He does so in tempting them to sin, as we have already seen, but he also does so by directly persecuting them. It was Satan who entered Judas to have Jesus destroyed by his betrayal and treachery (cf. Luke 22:3).

Some Christians wrongly think that coming to Christ will bring an end to all the trouble in their soul, that the Christian life will be characterized as all pleasantness and peacefulness, that they will be not be accosted by the enemy of their souls. But becoming a Christian may actually compound the trials and troubles that are experienced due to the devil. There will be problems with other people, problems dealing with things, and bad things will happen to us. There will be temptations that entice and trouble the Christian, the same kinds of temptations he encountered before becoming a Christian, but then they were not terribly troubling to him. Now, however, the Christian is tormented by the temptations that the devil lays before him day after day. Again, **John Flavel** wrote about this matter:

“Even those that are freed from his (Satan’s) *dominion*, are not free from his *molestation*. It is said indeed, Romans 16:20, “God shall shortly bruise Satan under your feet.” But meantime he has power to bruise and buffet us by injections (2 Cor. 12:7). He now bruises Christ’s heel (Gen. 3:15), i.e. bruises Him in His tempted and afflicted members. Though he cannot kill them, yet he can and doth afflict and fright them, by shooting fiery darts of temptation among them (Eph. 6:16). It is true, when the saints are got safe into heaven they are out of gunshot; there is perfect freedom from all temptation. A believer may then say, “O thou enemy, temptations are come to a perpetual end. I am now arrived there, where none of thy fiery darts can reach me.” But this freedom is not yet.⁶

⁶ Ibid.

It is often the case that when one becomes a Christian only then does he begin to experience some kinds of problems that are quite strange to his experience or his expectations. The devil may assault more directly the Christian, the one who is escaping his realm, rather than trouble the one who is firmly entrenched in his kingdom. Who is it that the devil is “seeking whom he may devour”, his own people? No, his assault is upon those who have repudiated his rule over them and who have enlisted in following King Jesus. If you are a follower of Jesus the devil is “*your adversary*.” Christians may find themselves more assaulted by the one like a “roaring lion” than they had ever experienced before they had become Christians.

The Christian life is described in the Scriptures as one characterized by conflict and difficulty. The Lord Jesus declared these words:

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; ³⁶and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ ³⁷He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matt. 10:34-39)

Paul wrote of his own struggles in serving and walking with our Lord.

⁸We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— ¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So then death is working in us, but life in you. (2 Cor. 4:8-12)

But not only is the devil our tempter and may be the devourer toward us, but we should also consider...

C. The devil as the deceiver

We saw how satan played this role in the Garden of Eden, for Eve was first deceived by the serpent. Paul had written elsewhere, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim 2:14). The devil had succeeded in leading her to first doubt the content of the Word of God and then to reject the authority of the Word of God over her.

The devil deceives many people through his ministers that he has strategically places in churches. Paul wrote of them.

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder! For satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is no great thing if *his ministers* also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (2 Cor. 11:13-15)

These ministers of satan do not teach error all together, for then they would be easy to identify. They lace their “sound” teaching with spiritual error—poison—that their hearers do not recognize readily. Over and over the Scriptures warn us against such ones. And sadly, even true ministers may depart from the faith and bring ruin to themselves and others (Acts 20:30f).

The Lord has given us many warnings in Scripture not to be deceived. Jesus Himself said, “Take heed that you not be deceived” (Luke 21:8). Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, “Do not be deceived” (1 Cor. 6:9). Actually he did so twice in 1 Corinthians (cf. 15:33). Paul also warned the churches of Galatia, “Do not be deceived” (Gal. 6:7). James wrote, “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren” (James 1:16). And when the devil one day is consigned to everlasting hell, it will be said of him, “The devil, who deceived

them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10). The devil is the deceiver. He is also the devourer. And the devil is the tempter. We are continuously waging warfare against this subtle and dangerous opponent of our Lord and of us, His people.

Let us return to our passage in Ephesians 6. After Paul had called for Christians to be strong and armed against their spiritual enemy (Eph. 6:10-13), we read his instruction that Christians are to...

II. Stand firm and put on God’s armour (6:14-20)

¹⁴Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— ¹⁹and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Paul gave the command in **verse 14**, “*Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth...*” Here we read of the position that the Christian is to maintain in his engagement with the devil—“Stand.” One once wrote,

To stand, is opposed to a cowardly flight from, or treacherous yielding to, the enemy. When a captain sees his men beginning to shrink, and perceives some disposition in them to flee or yield, then he bids *stand*; that is, stand manfully to it, and make good your ground against the enemy, by a valiant receiving his charge, and repelling his force.⁷

There are reasons suggested and stated to compel Christians to comply with this command. First, that it is a command that we do so. God has called us to stand to oppose the evil that would confront us. When we do stand, we do so for God, representing Him and standing for Him. “The soldier carries his prince’s honor into the field with him, and so doth the Christian his God’s.”⁸ A second reason to stand is that God has equipped us with every resource to enable us to stand valiantly and triumphantly. They are listed here before us. And then a third reason for standing is that it is the sure way to secure our safety and victory. In fact, to turn and flee would spell our certain failure and defeat, as well as disgrace. The Scriptures tell us that we are to “*flee* youthful lusts” (2 Tim. 2:2), but we are to take a stand and *resist* the devil (1 Pet. 5:8f).

You are to stand, but you are to do so “*having girded your waist with truth.*” Rather than viewing this as a scabbard around the waist that sheathed a weapon, this article of clothing corresponds with a Roman soldier’s leather apron which he wore under his armor that protected his thighs. The language alludes to God’s own defensive clothing in Isaiah 11:4 and 5 which reads,

But with righteousness He shall judge the poor,
And decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,
And faithfulness the belt of His waist. (Isa. 11:4f)

⁷ William Gurnall, **The Christian in Complete Armour** (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), p. 275.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 276.

The “truth” that Paul refers to is the “truth of God” revealed in the gospel. This truth is referenced in several places in this epistle (1:13; 4:15, 21, 24; 5:9). Christians are to stand with their wastes girded with truth so that they will be strengthened and stable in their standing before the evil one.

We then read further in verse 14 that these ones girded about the waste in truth are ones “*having put on the breastplate of righteousness.*” When we read of righteousness in Paul’s epistles, it is used both of the imputed righteousness of Christ that every true Christian has credited to him through faith alone, but it also refers to the practical outworking of faithful obedience to God’s law in the believers’ sanctification. There is imputed righteousness—the gift of the righteousness of Christ—, and there is imparted righteousness—the fruit of sanctifying grace wrought in us by the Holy Spirit. One’s confident assurance of his imputed righteousness evidenced and affirmed by the practical righteousness produced in his life by the Holy Spirit will protect the Christian from the deadly blows of the devil who would pierce his heart with doubt and unbelief.

And then in **verse 15** we read that the Christian is to stand “*having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.*” The soldier who stands in battle against his enemy needs solid footwear that will support him in his stance and withstand the forces that would repel him. To be shod with the gospel of peace speaks of assurance of one’s standing with his Savior, with His Lord. He is in a state of peace with God through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1), and he knows it deep within his soul. He stands strong and assured in this knowledge, confident that he will not be defeated regardless of the fierceness and power of his spiritual foe.

But most importantly, the soldier of Christ must have faith in His Lord that he will be enabled by Him to stand. Paul wrote of the spiritual soldier’s armour in **verse 16**, “*above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*” The shield that Paul referred to was not the small round shield commonly carried by some armies of the ancient world. It is a reference to the large Roman shield. “The shield referred to is not the small round one which left most of the body unprotected, but the large shield carried by the Roman soldiers, which covered the whole person.”⁹ Here is another description of this shield and its usefulness in battle:

As to the shield, the one to which reference is made here measured four feet in length by two and one half feet in breadth and was oblong in shape and covered with leather. It was a kind of “door” for protection against enemy-missiles dipped in pitch or similar material and set on fire before being discharged. When these darts collided with the shields their points were blunted, their flames extinguished. Similarly the exercise of genuine God-given faith enables one “to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.” In the devil’s quiver there are all kinds of fiery bolts. Paul mentions “tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine,” etc. Some of these missiles enkindle doubt, others lust, greed, vanity, envy, etc. Only by looking away from self to God Triune, placing one’s trust in Him for life, death, and eternity, relying on His word of revelation and promise, is it possible to repel this shower of flaming arrows.¹⁰

We then read in **verse 17**, “*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*” The helmet was a critical means of protection, for a blow to the head would be fatal, or at least debilitating that would result in one vulnerable to being slain. Assurance of salvation affords great spiritual protection when contending with the enemy. The writer to the Hebrews could tell of his own emboldened confidence in his standing with God through Christ. Referring to God’s promise to him he wrote, “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:6).

It is commonly asserted that the Word of God, here being the sword of the Spirit, is the only offensive weapon listed. This is certainly true, although prayer is also to be employed against the enemy. It has also

⁹ Peter T. O’Brien, **Ephesians**, p. 479.

¹⁰ William Hendriksen, **Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon**, New Testament Commentary. (Baker Academic, 1967), pp. 277f.

been rightly said that there is not armour listed for the soldier's back. He must stand, and go forward if possible, but never turn and run, for that would be a fatal move.

The Word of God is the sword of the Holy Spirit. It is the primary weapon of our warfare. Without it or apart from it we have nothing by which we may fight so as to defeat the enemy. But with it we cannot lose. The character, "Christian", in his battle with Apollyon in *The Pilgrim's Progress* gripped his sword—the Word of God—and thrust it into the side of the devil and won the day. Here is a portion of that engagement:

Then Apollyon broke out into a grievous rage, saying, "I am an enemy to this Prince; I hate his person, his laws, and people: I am come out on purpose to withstand thee."

CHRISTIAN. Apollyon, beware what you do; for I am in the King's highway, the way of holiness; therefore take heed to yourself.

Then Apollyon straddled quite over the whole breadth of the way, and said, "I am void of fear in this matter: prepare thyself to die; for I swear by my infernal den, that thou shalt go no further: here will I spill thy soul." And with that he threw a flaming dart at his breast; but Christian had a shield in his hand, with which he caught it, and so prevented the danger of that.

Then did Christian draw, for he saw it was time to bestir him; and Apollyon as fast made at him, throwing darts as thick as hail; by the which, notwithstanding all that Christian could do to avoid it, Apollyon wounded him in his head, his hand, and foot. This made Christian give a little back; Apollyon, therefore, followed his work amain, and Christian again took courage, and resisted as manfully as he could. This sore combat lasted for above half a day, even till Christian was almost quite spent; for you must know that Christian, by reason of his wounds, must needs grow weaker and weaker.

Then Apollyon, espying his opportunity, began to gather up close to Christian, and wrestling with him, gave him a dreadful fall; and with that Christian's sword flew out of his hand. Then said Apollyon, "I am sure of thee now." And with that he had almost pressed him to death, so that Christian began to despair of life. But, as God would have it, while Apollyon was fetching of his last blow, thereby to make a full end of this good man, Christian nimbly stretched out his hand for his sword, and caught it, saying, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall I shall arise," Micah 7:8; and with that gave him a deadly thrust, which made him give back, as one that had received his mortal wound. Christian perceiving that, made at him again, saying, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Romans 8:37. And with that Apollyon spread forth his dragon's wings, and sped him away, that Christian for a season saw him no more. James 4:7.

In **verse 18** Paul mentioned the importance of prayer when engaging the enemy of our souls. It reads, "*praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.*" There must always be a spirit of dependence upon the Lord and always making our petitions to the Lord in order to enable us to stand firm to withstand the spiritual attacks of the enemy. We are never to be self-reliant or presumptuous in our spiritual struggles, but we are to be praying and trusting, and leaning upon Him and His promises in Jesus Christ.

Take steps to know the methods of the enemy. Let us be equipped and ever ready "lest Satan should take advantage of us." May the Lord not let us be "ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). God has given us all that is necessary for us to withstand him. We need not be paranoid of him, in terror of him; rather, we may have confidence in God to give us victory! But you must be alert and watchful, armed and skilled in the use of your weapons, for that is how God has ordained that we succeed and come forth from the battle victorious.
