

## Know Your Enemy

I don't know what your churches are like after the Sunday service but at my church everyone lingers. There's a lot of chatter and it really has a nice feel to it. Well, every group has it's loud guy and one Sunday I was hanging around chatting and I hear our loud guy say, "Are you kidding me, are you kidding me, is it God or is it Satan,? Really? You don't know?"

The week before this I was talking to someone about a big decision I had made about ministry and they said to me, "What if you're listening to the wrong spirit?" Well, that had not occurred to me but the question made me wonder. So, I called this man, who is a close friend and a very godly man, and asked if we could talk. I meant it seriously and he took it seriously. I told him the situation and he asked a few questions about my decision. What it came to for him and the plum line that he has taught me to use is whose character is the call consistent with.

When we are making decisions we have to look at our motives and at our process. Are we being tempted into doing something, do we want to do it just for notoriety or money? That is not of God. We know that because James 1:13 says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." So, temptation is not consistent with God's character. Neither is greed or the love of money or wanting to be big in the eyes of other people.

Interestingly, the other thing that this all led me to realize is that Satan can use really good things to take us away from the very best that God has for us. Perhaps you have the natural gift of teaching or evangelism. Satan does not want you to use those gifts

to bring others into a saving knowledge of Christ. He will use other, perhaps lesser gifts, to tempt you into doing something good that will make you feel like you are serving the Lord but not with your primary gifts. Let's say you're teaching Sunday School and you have been teaching or are planning to deliver the gospel so children will be saved. Then comes this great opportunity to feed the hungry at a homeless shelter. You won't have any opportunity to teach but you will be able to show God's love in a practical way. You begin to think that you can't possibly do both. You'll need to give up the teaching to work at the shelter.

Is that of God or is that of Satan? Pray, pray, pray, ask God to close the door if it isn't from Him. But consider what the fruit of each ministry might be. One of the marks of mature Christianity is that we will want to do what God calls us to do, not just what sounds good to us or looks good to the world. It may be that God is calling you to do both and Satan's lie is that you don't have time for both.

There are lots of things that I believe Satan has a hand in. Think about political correctness. That is a great victory for him in my opinion. He has a whole nation of Christians afraid to say anything that might offend people. Well ladies, the gospel is offensive. Sin is offensive. People really don't like to hear that they are sinners. I was nothing less than insulted the first time I heard the preaching that everyone – including me – was a sinner.

I also believe that Satan is behind the regular over commitment and over involvement of Christians in the world. There is an evil influence in the world that says if we aren't involved in every aspect of our children's lives, if they aren't playing in the band, on a sports team, in Advanced Placement classes, and in a club for kids then they

are going to be social misfits and it will be our fault! Who on earth has any time to spend in the Bible or to teach their children to? If we don't study it we'll never grow close to God. If we don't grow close to God we won't influence anyone else for Him – including our children. It appears that Satan has won that round.

And goodness knows we should never mention Jesus – especially not to a Jew or a Muslim. What a coup for Satan! Other religions may speak up but not the Christian. You see other religions are no threat to Satan, in fact they belong to Satan so he doesn't even bother with them but lets them go.

Now, I'm sure to some of you that is also offensive teaching, that other religions belong to Satan. Look at what the Bible says. This is hard but the truth is not always easy. What we learn from the scriptures is that we have two choices in life. We are either children of God or children of Satan. Turn to 1 John 3: 4-10. John is writing to brothers in the Christian faith. He has talked to them about being the children of God and the righteousness we will practice when we belong to God. Then, starting in verse 4, he explains further. **Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he (Jesus) appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.**

Everyone in the world either belongs to God or they belong to Satan. Certainly we can see this in the way the world works. We, as Christians, are contrary to the world. We have a different set of values and a different view of the world. Sadly, so many Christians haven't taken to studying the Bible so they live under the influence of the world that's been strongly influenced by Satan.

What John really teaches here is that we will know who belongs to God and who belongs to Satan by how they live. The children of God are described in the previous verses as practicing righteousness. But the one who practices sin, not just the occasional sin, we all do that, look at verse 6. **No one who abides in Him *keeps on* sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him."**

Now, Christians can backslide. I think that this is talking about a long term – no evidence of really even wanting to know what God thinks, kind of keeping in sin. I often talk to Moms who have raised their children in the church. The child made a profession of faith at a young age but there has never been any fruit. They have continued to be in sin, never repentant, never any conviction, no desire to know Jesus Christ, and they want to insist that the child is saved. I am telling you we do that child a disservice by keeping that up. We are handing him over to Satan if we aren't praying for his or her salvation!

Now, lest we despair, Satan can't have his way without God's say. The truth is that Satan does nothing without the permission of God. The universe belongs to the Lord God Almighty. It is his creation. Satan is a fallen angel, not a mighty foe of God's. He is to us but not to God.

Turn with me to Job 1:6. Verses 1 through 5 describe Job as a blameless man, starting in verse 6, **Now there was a day when the sons of God (these are angels) came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said**

to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. (Job 1:6-12)

Most of us know the rest of this story. Satan went on to take Job's property, inflict physical pain on him, kill his children and his livestock, and pretty much took all Job had including his health. Though Job questioned God – and then regretted it, (Job 40:4-5) he never cursed God.

Look at chapter 42, the last chapter of the book. I want you to see that even the Word of God says that God was fully aware and agreed to this – with limits. Verse 11, Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him *for all the adversities that the LORD had brought upon him*. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold. And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. (Job 42:11-12)

What the verses in chapter 1 do is give us the birds eye view that Job didn't have. God allowed these trials into Job's life and God limited these trials. We aren't told why

God wanted to test his faith but we are told that He did. Perhaps because Job had been blameless but also very successful we needed to see that Job would continue to trust God even in the hardest of times. Can you see that without God's permission Satan would not have been able to attack Job like this?

It's also important to see, though, that Satan is the one who authored the evil. God did not stop him but neither did He offer suggestions or help. Satan was behind all the evil. God put the limit on it.

I think it's significant – and we pretty much ignore it – that in the Lord's prayer in Matthew six one of the things that Jesus says we're to pray for is protection from evil. We ask God for that because He is the One who can give it! Many churches rotely recite the Lord's prayer but it was meant as a model for us to use for our prayers. Are you and I praying daily for spiritual protection?

Well, let's get practical about Satan. First of all in our lives Satan himself is probably not much of a problem. We, quite frankly, aren't all that productive for the Lord. It is the person who is preaching boldly and with great results that Satan himself wants to stop. The rest of us may have to deal with his minions but often we're dealing with our flesh, that is our own sinful desires! Satan and his demons get blamed for a lot that comes straight out of our own hearts. "The devil made me do it is often not true!

1 John 2:16 **For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions--is not from the Father but is from the world.**

Well, what do we have to be careful of and pray for protection from with regard to evil? The Bible tells us several things. Four that I clearly found are that Satan is a

tempter, an accuser, a deceiver, and a devourer. He is crafty but not omnipresent. He can't be everywhere at once.

In the Garden of Eden Eve was deceived by Satan, Genesis 3:1-5 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

God had clearly told Eve that she was not to eat of the tree. The devil deceived her into thinking that God was keeping something from them, a knowledge that would make her like God. Eve apparently wanted to be like God (seems like we all do). Satan will take that thing that is our own desire and tempt us to do things that are not of God to get what we want – or what we *think* we want.

Some of us really do fall into the world's trap of wanting what everyone else has. If this is a desire of yours or mine Satan might try to tempt us with a house that we can't really afford. It seems harmless enough. Everyone lives in a big house these days and everyone goes into debt to buy it. But, if this is not God's plan for you or me, if we have to work at a job that pays better than the one God has called us to then Satan has won by tempting us to buy a house rather than answering God's call on our lives. Even college debt may be placed in this category, as many people cannot serve God because of it.

As an accuser Satan will take our sin before the Lord and accuse us to Him. Revelation 12:10 says that he accuses us before God day and night, which according to one commentator (Barnes, E Sword) means that he accuses us in the presence of God. He will attack us in character or sincerity (as he did with Job when he told God that Job would curse God if He took away Job's possessions), perhaps accusing us of doing things for the wrong motives or just plain hypocrisy. He wants to bring every Christian and the church at large in question in other people's minds. So, the last thing we want to do is give Satan anything to work with. We will sin but if it is confessed sin when he accuses us to God, it's already been removed!

Another way that he accuses us is to ourselves. When we become Christians we become painfully aware of our own sin. We get convicted of it by the holy Spirit but then, sometimes evil will seem to be speaking right into our hearts about just how bad and horribly deficient we are for God's purposes. This is another time when we need to examine what we're hearing. The Holy Spirit will convict us of sin for our good, so we can confess it and get it behind us in the sight of God. The Accuser though, will berate us and make us doubt the confession. "Was that enough?", "do I need to examine it further?", i.e. dwell on it until I am so ashamed (even after confession) that I won't go boldly into the presence of God but am more likely to slither into God's presence?

The major difference between conviction of sin from God and accusations from the devil is that the Holy Spirit wants to restore our fellowship with God and the devil wants to ruin our fellowship with Him.

Is there some area of your life that you beat yourself up about? Do you sometimes think that you're useless or because of guilt from the past that you can't be effective for

the Lord? The next time you think like that, pray. Ask God to banish Satan, stand firm in your faith that God created you and you are valuable to Him. He has removed your sin as far as the East is from the West! He will eliminate the evil influence that you ask Him to get rid of.

As the deceiver, Satan is much more subtle. This is what he did with Eve in the garden. “Did God really say?” There will be some little element of truth in the deception so that it makes us hear something that sounds reasonable. Personally, I think that it’s Satan who has given the world this deception that Jesus was a great teacher, a really good man, He gave us a great example to live by but that’s about it. The fact that Jesus is God, the third person of the Trinity who came to save us from our sin has been lost. It is Satan’s deception that says that all roads lead to heaven, all religions have an equal footing before God. And he has deceived so many!

When we take a good look at the Bible, which we’ll see in a few minutes, is the only effective weapon against the schemes of the devil, we will see that Jesus said some pretty radical stuff. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6), I and the Father are one (John 10:30).” Pilate asked Him if He was a King and He acknowledged that He was a king. He said if you know Me you will know the Father. On and on it goes. We have three choices about what to believe in regard to Jesus. He was a liar, He was a lunatic, or He is the Lord, just as He said He is. Satan has deceived those who think He was a just a good teacher, an example we should follow!

The devourer was a little harder for me to get a handle on. What is it that Satan devours? It seems to me that it’s mostly truth that he devours as he is a liar but 1 Peter 5:8

warns us, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” So, like a hungry lion he’s waiting for his prey, trying to scare them for his advantage, which is what a roaring lion is doing. He wants to intimidate to make his prey easier to kill. Satan wants to devour us so that we are useless for the Lord.

Well, other places we learn that Satan will lie, discourage, bring doubt, and even masquerade as an angel of light to get us to do things that will draw us away from God. But, do we need to fear him? Are we to hunker down and protect ourselves, hiding from anyone who might try to get us to talk about the Lord? Obviously not. There are many people who are so afraid of Satan that they have really offered very little to the Lord. 1 John 4:4 says, “Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. “

God is so faithful to us, His people. He did leave Satan, but He also left us with the Truth about how crafty but ultimately impotent he is. He has left us with the instructions on how we are to respond to the devil.

First He left us an example in how to resist Him in the way Jesus did in Matthew 4 starting in verse 1.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit (this is the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity who is leading Jesus into these tests of His faith) into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Do you hear how deliberate this was? He was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of being tempted.) And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. (Understatement) And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered,

"It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and 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.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

The temptations that Jesus faces here represent the same temptations we, as humans, face throughout our lives. Jesus had not eaten in 40 days (do you think He was hungry?) and Satan starts with food. If you're really the Son of God turn these stones to bread. How Jesus must have wanted to do that! But, the answer He gives is straight from the Word of God, which is what He was relying on in His temptation to eat in a way that would have been sinful! The sin was in the way Satan presented the challenge as if the Son of God would have a divine right to do what He wanted rather than what God the Father wanted. In everything Jesus did on earth we're told that He did only what God gave him to do, He would not make Himself an authority apart from His Father. He would wait for food, trusting God to provide it.

The second challenge was the temptation to cast Himself down from the temple. The temptation here seems to be that He would presume on his faith in God and disobey

God's laws, the presumption being that God would protect Him even if He was in disobedience. When we test God like this it shows spiritual pride that wants some personal glory – even though we're out of God's will. (Jews of Jesus' day expected their Messiah to descend miraculously from the temple.) Were Jesus to have done this it would have been a very grand entrance drawing people to the miracle rather than God's plan of the quiet response to the Holy Spirit He wanted from His people.

The third temptation was to use ungodly means to accomplish what God had promised. Satan wanted to tempt Jesus with all that the world had to offer. Hadn't God already offered Christ the rulership of the world? He didn't have to take power because He knew that God would give it to Him in His time!

The most important thing for tonight's lesson is that we see that Jesus overcame in all three of these major temptations through the word of God and trust in Him. Jesus was saturated in the Scriptures. We know that from at least age 12 He was in the temple learning and talking about them with the teachers of the day. When He was tempted by Satan the Word of God was already there and ready to be used as His sword in the battle.

If we look at the end of Matthew 3, the other thing we can see is that He was most tempted to pridefully sin against God right after a spiritual high. He had just been baptized and heard God – from heaven – say, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.” Wouldn't that have given you some confidence in your own abilities to make decisions? Not Jesus. He did only what the Father wanted him to do. His only goal was to accomplish the work His Father had called him to do!

One of Satan's ploys is to attack when we are feeling spiritually strong, right after a spiritual victory. We need to be careful not to ever feel invincible toward his tactics. He will use it against us!

Faith in and knowledge of the Word of God are the best weapons we can possibly use against evil attacks. I was a very nominal Christian until I was well into my thirties and I had thought that the emphasis that the evangelical churches placed on scripture memorization was all a lot of nonsense. I figured that we have the Bible we can just go look up the verses when we need them. I now see how foolish that thinking was. I was moved by a testimony I had heard at my church of a young man who was drug to AWANA (boy/girl scouts for Christian kids). In Awana you advance through the ranks by scripture memorization. He only did it because he was in big trouble at home if he didn't. He was a rebel and walked away from the Lord as soon as he could live apart from his parents.

At age 24 he was in a terrible car accident. I can't say that Satan was the cause of that accident, what we know is that God allowed it and used it. His testimony is that all that scripture that he had memorized came flooding back to him. The Holy Spirit was able to use it to remind him at that moment what was true of God and His love for Him and how much of a help He would be. That man is a fortyish man of God today – because He had scripture tucked away in his mind for use when the Lord was drawing him back. God uses all things for good for those who love Him.

Knowing the scriptures means that we will see the truth of our circumstances and of our God when they occur.

We won't be able to take the kind of time these verses deserve but open your bibles to Ephesians 6:10 – 18 and let's look at the specific instructions God has left us for what we are to do in this battle with evil.

Ephesians 6:10, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

This is an interesting command to think about because I immediately want to know "how" do I be strong in the Lord? The answer is to do what He says. If we are being obedient to God, not relying on our own confidence or abilities, speaking when He tells us to speak and going where He tells us to go, then we won't have to rely on our own strength or intellect. It is the strength of His might that will be our protection. The same strength that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in us. Our strength lies in what He will do when we obey Him. But the counterattacks will come against you and me so God has given us armor for the battle.

So listen to what we are arming ourselves against. Verse 11, Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 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.

We've already talked about the schemes of the devil. He is a master tempter, deceiver, and accuser. He causes doubt and tells out and out lies to us. We look at what comes against us and it may seem that other people are behind it – and sometimes they are but sometimes Satan is using some form of earthly trouble to weaken our stand in the

Lord. How do we arm ourselves against this kind of warfare? Let's take it one piece at a time.

Verse 14, Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, this is the belt of *confidence* in God's truth wrapped around our middle! If we know the Word of God but don't have faith that it will help us, it's useless. We're to use it just as Jesus did when Satan tempted Him in the desert It reminds us of where our strength comes from and who is already the victor over evil. And having put on the breastplate of righteousness, This breastplate – it seems to me – would save us from the accusations of the devil. If we attempt to live righteous lives before God we can stand firm when he starts to accuse us. As we conform to the image of Christ we will grow in confidence of His abilities to resist the temptations of evil powers. (Story of Laura Robinson and the shield of protection when teaching and serving the Lord obediently). (Verse 15) and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. This is a little harder for most commentaries to define. It seems that the Roman soldiers wore a tough leather sandal that protected their feet and gave them some stability in battle. It seems like Paul is saying that the readiness for battle comes from the peace of knowing our salvation is of the Lord, this salvation gives us the stability to identify temptation. (Verse 16) In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; The shield of the Roman soldier covered his body from head to toe, if dipped in water before a battle it could put out arrows of fire that had been dipped in pitch and lit before firing. It is by faith that we can hold firm to the truths we know of our Lord so that the flaming arrows of the devil will not burn us with his temptations. (Verse 17) and take the helmet of salvation, For Paul salvation was a present experience or truth

as well as a future hope when God would call His own Home. He will complete the work He started in us. We can only understand what is happening now in light of our relationship to the Lord and we can only face what is happening now with the Hope of what awaits us. So, by faith with the helmet of salvation we can stand firm against the evil one knowing that Christ has already conquered Satan and that He will come again and finish what's left of the job! **and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,** He plainly tells us that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. This is the one offensive weapon that God gives us. All the others are defensive but we can attack with God's word when we are tempted or accused. Interestingly, the sword of a Roman soldier was short – it was meant for man to man combat. Isn't this how we should use the word of God – man to man – woman to woman? The Word of God is also a great defensive piece of armor. If we have stored up God's word in our hearts so that we know the truth about Him we will be ready for any attack on His character or integrity that we may be tempted to believe. Peter warns us in 2 Peter about false teachers who will come in and try to deceive believers. He says we need faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. If we put on the pieces of the armor of God we'll have all of those and we'll show the brotherly kindness and love in that we'll do what he tells us next. (Verse 18) **praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.** To all of that armor Paul adds prayer in the Spirit. He even wants them to pray for all the saints – not just their own battles but for others as well. We should be praying for our own spiritual protection as well as the spiritual protection of all the saints! (sigh)

I heard a missionary who was serving in Afghanistan speak several years ago. The presence of evil was very real and obvious to most people. She said that in America we treat prayer as supplemental to the finances for the missionary. Oh but, she said, how wrong we are. It is fundamental, not supplemental. Money won't stop Satan, only God can.

Do you notice here that there is no armor for the back? We do not need to run from evil. We need to stand firm in our faith in God in the face of it. When we are tempted, when we hear deceptive teaching, when Satan accuses us of being worthless and of low character, when we feel like he is lying in wait to devour us – we need to pray. He is no match for the Lord God Almighty.

We tend to think of evil on a large scale. Personally, I think the evil one and his minions love to work in the little stuff. Think about Sunday mornings – especially if you have young children. Isn't getting to church one of the hardest parts of the week? Lost shoes, grumpy dads, spilled grape juice on the new dress, and now every sport wants to play or practice on Sunday morning. I think the devil enjoys every minute of every argument. We have a choice about whether or not to give him his fun.

I think this is also true of Christian marriages. The more petty arguments we get into with our spouses, the less attractive marriage is to the next generation. We need to think about every small argument and ask ourselves, “do I need to react or if I do am I giving the evil one a victory over God's plan for families?”

Don't fall into his trap but remind yourself of the truths you know about him and about our Lord. Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

