

Power Over the Enemy 1 Peter 5:8-9

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There's a whole different world out there, the spiritual world, of which most of the time we're only dimly aware. This is why I want us to spend time examining what the Bible teaches on this topic.

We need to be reminded, on a regular basis, that there's more to reality than what we can see, hear, touch, and measure.

As Christians, we should know this, but the world tells us something different all the time, every day.

The world's attitude is summed up in the words of the astronomer Carl Sagan, who said, *"The Cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be."*

This approach, to understanding the world which rejects the idea of supernatural beings, conflicts with the Bible. Listen to Peter's warning.

1 Peter 5:8-9, *"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings."*

Peter's warning us against an evil and terrifying creature; one who's constantly on the prowl, *"looking for someone to devour;"* an enemy who must be resisted with sober-minded alertness.

The New Testament refers to him over eighty times, as Satan, the devil, the evil one, or simply the enemy. The Bible tells us that he's always active, opposing God's works and God's people.

Yet, in most Christian circles, you rarely hear him mentioned. It's as if we're embarrassed to admit that we still believe in him. Perhaps we don't want to be mocked by our unbelieving friends.

Our challenge is to see the world the way Peter sees it, and then to follow his instructions on how to successfully defend ourselves against this powerful and malevolent supernatural foe.

In order to do this, we must accept what the Bible teaches and reject what our secular, unbelieving culture tells us. Pretending that our enemy doesn't really exist, doesn't mean that he'll leave us alone.

In fact, ignoring the life-and-death spiritual battles being waged all around us and discounting the attacks being directed toward us, doesn't make us safe.

It simply means that we can't defend ourselves effectively. If we don't use the tools and weapons that God has given us, Satan will prevail and we can't allow that to happen.

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So, who is Satan? The first thing that we need to understand is that the term, "Satan," is not just a metaphor for evil.

The devil's not a symbol of some abstract idea, like corruption or wickedness. Satan is a real, personal being. He actually exists. So, where did he come from?

The answer may surprise you. God made him. According to the Bible, Satan was a powerful angel who fell victim to pride and rebelled against God.

Leading a cohort of angels, he attempted to takeover heaven, but Satan and his minions were defeated after which they were cast down to earth.

Revelation 12:7-9, *“Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”*

Those fallen angels are what we know as demons, and Satan is their ruler. But remember, God created Satan, just as He created all the angels and everything else that exists.

Colossians 1:15-16, *“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.”*

God created all things through Christ, including Satan and the angels who rebelled with him. Satan isn't an independent force of evil; he doesn't operate outside the realm of God's sovereignty.

He is under God's dominion, just like every other part of creation. Yes, he's very powerful but God's only allowing him to operate in this world for a limited time. He's on a leash; he's under God's control.

He has always been under God's control, and he always will be. In fact, Satan has to ask God for permission when he wants to attack someone.

We see this in Luke 22, where Jesus is speaking to Peter at the last supper:

Luke 22:31-32, *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”*

Christ tells Peter that Satan “asked” for permission to test the disciples. We must remember that, as powerful as Satan may be, he can only do what God permits him to do.

You may also recall that Job was terribly afflicted by Satan. When you read the first two chapters of the book of Job, you’ll find that Satan had to seek permission from God for everything that he caused Job to suffer.

Satan has no independent power or authority. If he afflicts us, or attacks us, it’s only because God has permitted him to do so. He can do nothing that God has not permitted him to do.

As I mentioned earlier, Satan is always under God’s control and authority. That’s why we should always appeal to God, as our Father, to rein Satan in, to bind him, to make his attacks null and void, and to thwart his evil and destructive purposes.

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Although Satan’s under God’s authority, that doesn’t mean we should ignore him.

God, for His own good and wise purposes, has chosen to allow our conflict with Satan to continue in this world until Jesus returns.

Therefore, we must contend against Satan. We must resist him and oppose him. We must battle against him.

But, what else do we know about Satan? We know that he stands behind and directs all the corrupt and evil systems of this world.

1 John 5:19, *“We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”*

“The whole world is under the control of the evil one.” Does that mean that people are intentionally and knowingly doing Satan’s bidding? Not at all. He’s too subtle and clever for that. Satan has deceived them.

He has convinced them that they are on the right side; that they are serving truth, justice, equality, and virtue. These people do not understand that they’re being manipulated by spiritual forces they don’t comprehend.

Now, before we get too discouraged, remember that this is all temporary. What Satan’s doing in the world now, what God’s allowing him to do, won’t last because Satan is a defeated foe.

His destruction is foreordained. His wicked plans and purposes will not succeed in the end.

In fact, he has already lost; the outcome isn’t in doubt. When Christ returns, all of Satan’s works will be destroyed.

He will be utterly defeated and cast into the lake of fire, never to rise again. That victory was won by Christ on the cross, and it will be brought to fulfillment when Jesus returns.

Colossians 2:15, *“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”*

Satan is real. He is not irrelevant; he’s not a relic of a bygone age. He has immense power to do harm, for now, but remember he has already been defeated by Christ on the cross.

That triumph will come to completion when Jesus returns. Until then, we have a secret weapon to use against Satan: The Holy Spirit.

The one who is “in us,” the Spirit of Christ, is far greater and far more powerful than the one who is in the world; that is, Satan.

In Christ, we have already defeated him. It only remains for us to claim that victory, each and every day.

Now, make no mistake; although the final victory over Satan has already been won, we must each claim it for ourselves, lest we be “devoured” by the “roaring lion” that Peter warned us about.

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When we find ourselves becoming discouraged, or anxious, or being tempted to sin; when we sense that we’re being deceived or led astray from the truth; when we start to lose heart and are tempted to wander away from Christ, what can we do?

Let’s start with what we don’t do. We don’t attempt to engage Satan or demons directly. That would be the height of folly.

Satan is far craftier, far more knowledgeable, far more powerful, and far more experienced at spiritual warfare than we are. He’s been doing this for thousands of years, and knows all the tricks.

In the hymn, “*A Mighty Fortress is Our God*,” Martin Luther wrote:

*“For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal. On earth is not his equal.”*

No human being can stand up to Satan. If we were to rely on our own power, or our own cleverness, we’d lose.

All of those old folk tales about people outwitting Satan, like “*The Devil and Daniel Webster*,” or books and movies where people outmaneuver Satan and get the best of him—those are just dangerous fantasies. That doesn’t ever happen.

That's why you should never speak directly to Satan or his demons to "rebuke" or "bind" them. Don't employ incantations, formulas, or special words or phrases. That's magic or sorcery, not Christian faith.

So, what are we supposed to do when we sense ourselves being spiritually afflicted, oppressed, or tempted? First, we must repent of sin, especially sins which drive a wedge between you and other Christians.

Ephesians 4:26-27, *"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."*

What's Satan's desire? What drives him? Jesus tells us in John's gospel that Satan's purpose is *"to steal and kill and destroy."* But what does he desire to destroy most of all? The church. Why?

It's through the church, the body of Christ, that God is setting Satan's captives free with the message of the Gospel. Satan will do whatever he can to extinguish the life of the church.

He wants to steal our joy. He wants to destroy our love for one another. He wants to discredit us in the eyes of the world. He wants to neutralize our witness for Christ.

However, he can't do any of those things if we don't give him an opportunity, a *"foothold"* as Paul wrote in Ephesians 4.

Satan is always scheming to attack the church—this church and every faithful, Bible-believing church—but the good news is that he can't do that successfully unless we allow him to sow discord and conflict; unless we invite him in to disrupt our fellowship.

By doing what? By refusing to forgive, by holding on to resentment, bitterness and anger.

By allowing walls to be built between God's people instead of building bridges. By forgetting that we're brothers and sisters in Christ.

So, let's not do any of those things and if we have done any of those things, repent and resolve to love one another by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Let me take this a little farther. Sin, in general, provides Satan with an opportunity to draw you away from God and steal your joy.

When you sin, you open the door to your heart, giving him an opportunity to draw you away from your Father.

When you harbor sin in your heart—any sin—and don't repent, turn away from it, then over time that sin becomes dear to you. You nourish it. You protect it and cherish it.

Whatever the sin may be: Bitterness and resentment toward someone, greed, lying or deception, lust, pride, a lack of faith or a dozen other things. Only you and God know what's in your heart.

But whatever it is, when we hold onto, nurture and protect our sins instead of confessing them, repenting of them and forsaking them, we're giving Satan an invitation to steal our joy and kill our love for God.

When we harbor sin, Satan will come along and whisper something like this: *"God's so unfair to deny you this little pleasure. God is so unreasonable to demand that you give this up. Who does He think He is? Why shouldn't you have the things you want? Why shouldn't you be able to act the way you want? It's not hurting anyone. Besides, you work hard. You've made so many sacrifices. You deserve it. But God won't let you have it. Why? Because He doesn't really love you. He just wants to control you."*

Have you ever heard that voice in your mind? Little by little, Satan will pull you away from your loving Father. He'll alienate you from Christ, your Savior.

His attacks are very subtle, but they all have the same goal... to separate you from God, and to separate us from one another.

Sin gives him an opportunity to do that, unless we repent. The good news is that God is more than willing to forgive any and all sins; in fact He delights in doing so.

Christ's death on the cross not only defeated Satan, but it also purchased forgiveness for all who trust in Him. Repenting of sin is the first thing we need to do in order to resist and overcome Satan.

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Another thing we need to do is found in 1 Peter 5:7, "*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*"

Fear and anxiety are reliable ways for Satan to induce people to put aside their faith because people will do almost anything out of fear.

They'll be tempted to make compromises and cross lines that they never thought they would, if they're frightened.

That fear may be for themselves: for their health, their financial security, their safety or for someone they care about, such as a family member.

So, what should we do when we find ourselves becoming anxious, worried, frightened, or whatever may be the cause of that fear? We should give our anxiety, fear, and worries to God in prayer.

By doing that, we remind ourselves that God's in control, that we belong to Him, and that He loves us.

We're reminded that even if the thing we fear does come to pass, God will never leave us or forsake us. In faith, He'll strengthen us and our spirit so that we can endure whatever comes.

What else does Peter tell us to do in order to overcome Satan?

1 Peter 5:8-9, *"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings."*

"Be alert and of sober mind." In other words, pay attention to what's going on. Jesus tells us that Satan's a liar. He's a deceiver. He'll try to confuse us.

Now, thankfully, as we learned several weeks ago, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, and He enables us to see through Satan's deceptions. But we must make the effort to evaluate what's happening from a Biblical perspective.

That's why it's so important to have a firm grasp on the reality of spiritual warfare, and the reality of Satan's attacks on each one of us and on the church itself.

This awareness isn't so we can be fearful or intimidated, but so we can respond in faith and wisdom to defeat Satan.

If we think about what's happening in our lives, in the church, and in our nation today in purely human terms; if we ignore the reality of spiritual warfare, then we'll respond only with human approaches and human weapons.

But if we understand that behind all of this, behind everything that we can see and hear, there's a war going on in the spiritual realm, then we'll respond with spiritual weapons.

That's why when we respond with faith, love and prayer, we will prevail.

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Conclusion

We should practice thinking about people and situations, especially people and situations in the church, not merely in human terms, but also in terms of the spiritual battle that's going on around us, all the time.

We should practice thinking about our nation and our elected officials not merely in human terms, but also in terms of the spiritual battle that's going on all the time.

If we do that, it'll dramatically alter our perspective and change our response to situations.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds."

Our weapons are truth, faith, prayer, love, humility and obedience to Christ. If we'll make use of those weapons, then Satan can't stand against us.

His "strongholds," his power bases will be destroyed. Not by our power, but by divine power, the power of God. If we commit to doing that, we will triumph over him.