

YOUR ADVERSARY, THE DEVIL

5⁸ Be [spiritually] sober. Be alert. Your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, is prowling around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him by standing firm in the faith, knowing that the same [ordeals] of suffering are being placed upon your brothers throughout the world. ¹⁰ But after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will personally restore you, support you, strengthen you, and establish you. ¹¹ To him belongs the dominion forever. Amen. (1 Pet. 5:8-11)

Introduction

Two African preachers set out to visit a neighboring village one Sunday morning. As they walked along a narrow trail across a wide plain with tall grass on either side, they became conscious that they were being followed. They turned around, and were terrified to see that they were being stalked by a lion.

There was no tree to climb; and it was hopeless to try to outrun a lion! So they prayed to God to protect them. Then they courageously turned their backs on the lion and walked on quietly. Glancing behind them they saw that the lion was still following them. He continued to follow them at a distance until they came to a place where another path branched off from the one they were traveling.

They traveled a few paces down their path, then turned around and faced the lion. The lion also stopped. The two preachers pointed to the other path and said to the lion, "We beg you to take that path while we take this one." The lion lowered his head and growled. The preachers asked the Lord to come to their rescue. Then they addressed the lion again: "In the name of Jesus Christ, we command you to take the other path!" The men then turned and continued along their path—when they looked behind them they saw the lion walking off down the other path. (*Mrs. Knight's Book of Illustrations*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publish. Co. Grand Rapids MI, 1964, pp. 23-24.)

The Apostle Peter warns: *"Be alert. Your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, is prowling around, looking for someone to devour."*

Because our adversary, the devil, is on the prowl, looking to devour souls, we must take the necessary precautions.

I. Because the Devil is Your Adversary, ...You Must Be on Guard

We must be on guard with respect to the devil's presence. We must take seriously both the reality as well as the power of the devil—something that Peter foolishly discounted on an earlier occasion. Just prior to the time of His arrest, our Lord warned Peter, *"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. ³² But I have*

prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Lk. 22:31-32.) But Peter failed to heed our Lord's warning, being confident in his own ability to withstand the devil: *"he replied, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death'"* (Lk. 22:33.) The Gospel of Matthew adds Peter's further comment, *"Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will"* (Matt. 26:33.)

The Christian writer, C.S. Lewis, declared: "There are two types of people whom the devil loves, the materialist and the "magician." The materialist is one who foolishly discounts the reality and the relevance of the devil. The "magician" is one who exhibits an unhealthy interest in the devil, foolishly dabbling with the powers of darkness. The Word of God teaches us to take the devil seriously, and warns us to be on guard against the forces of evil. Bear in mind the prayer our Lord instructs us to pray with regard to temptation and the devil; we are to petition our heavenly Father, *"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"* (Matt. 6:13.) Consider the testimony of a young social worker:

I had just graduated from college in the San Francisco Bay Area, where the prevailing wisdom held that we had long ago surpassed such categories as good and evil.

I had never had the opportunity to visit Waddy and Nell [a man and wife who lived in the Richmond, VA, ghetto area known as Fulton and who were known for their illegal operations in the community, in particular, the selling of illegal liquor.]

I wanted to know more about Fulton's bootleggers. I thought my story of this community otherwise would be incomplete. Yet few residents would discuss the subject ... At length, I decided to ask Waddy and Nell themselves.

Although I didn't realize it at the time, I was making a mistake. Waddy and Nell had blood on their hands.

I drove into Fulton on a Saturday afternoon in December.

I parked my car around the corner from Waddy and Nell's place ... I locked the car and walked into the street. When I was twenty paces from the Crowders' front porch I saw Nell coming toward me. She carried a shopping bag and appeared to be returning from the market ... She invited me to come inside.

The front hallway was dark. I walked forward, then a door opened and I saw two dozen men standing and sitting in a room, old and cave like. The walls were rough and covered with soot. I saw a huge cast-iron stove glowing red and white and heard a fire sucking and rumbling inside. A man sat before the stove, arms crossed on his chest, and stared into the fire. I recognized Waddy.

Nell proceeded into a back room, the kitchen, and seemed to forget I was there. I sat down in a chair near an open door to the kitchen.

A dog the size of a large rat scampered at my feet, then ran into the kitchen. I followed. The door of one refrigerator was open and I could see inside ... I saw clear, tall bottles with new labels. The bottles had black caps that had not been sealed with a tax stamp.

Nell walked into the other room ... Waddy walked into the kitchen. Now was my chance. "Say, Waddy," I said, "do you know anything about stills and bootlegging in Fulton?"

Waddy looked at me with the expression of a man who has drunk too much lead-poisoned corn whiskey over the years. He grunted. Nell appeared from the other room. "Why don't you sit down in here, Chris?" she said and motioned me out of the kitchen.

I returned to my chair ... My thoughts drifted. I remembered the stories I had heard about this house, these men, and about Nell. The murders were real. I had never visualized them before, but sitting here I seemed powerless to exclude from my mind images of Nell's victims bleeding to death on her front porch.

Nell ... had a calculating intelligence. She missed nothing. Apparently she had become the mastermind of Waddy's operation; she was the one who schemed, negotiated, and enforced contracts with suppliers in Charles City County, bribed the police, and cut out competitors. She was the one who prevented outsiders from learning too much, dealing with them swiftly and mercilessly if they came too close.

I heard Nell's voice behind me in the kitchen. But this was not the folksy, charming Nell Nell was interrogating Waddy, speaking quickly and sharply in a low voice, ... and her tone was one of cunning and evil such as I have never heard before.

Suddenly I realized that Nell was questioning Waddy about what he had said to me. Had Waddy given them away? ... I could feel her thought like a great stone blocking my escape: Does Chris know too much? I felt uneasy to put it mildly.

Nell Crowder stopped talking. Waddy walked into the living room.

I stood, turned, and entered the kitchen. Nell had returned to her jovial self. But she seemed overly friendly, as though trying to put me off guard ... "Would you like to stay for dinner?" Nell asked.

“I think maybe I should be going now, Nell,” I said.

The notion that ... social problems ... are disorders that will disappear if they are given sympathy, government money, and a dose of technical expertise is based on illusions. It does not recognize the existence of evil—withering, bone-crushing evil like that of Nell.

Patience Gromes [a Christian woman living in the same community as Waddy and Nell] was convinced that good and evil are not the arbitrary designations of a class, a generation, or a culture ... Now, after visiting Waddy and Nell and seeing with my own eyes, I can say ... Patience Gromes was right. Good and evil are not arbitrary conceptions. They describe actual forces and conditions of life that we ignore at our peril. (*The World of Patience Gromes*, Scott C. Davis, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington KY, 1988, pp.182-189)

We must be on guard with respect to the devil’s tactics:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field Jehovah God had made. And he said to the woman, Indeed, has God said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden? ²And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³but concerning the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, or else you will die. ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die; ⁵for God knows that in the day you eat [the fruit of that tree] your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be like God, knowing good and evil. ⁶And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired as a means of making one wise, she took of its fruit, and ate it; and she also gave [some] to her husband with her, and he ate it. (Gen. 3:1-6)

The devil will seek to disorient you and confuse you, as he did with Eve. Note God’s clear command previously given to Adam, as recorded in Genesis 2:16-17, *“And Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, From every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷but you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”* Contrast that clear command with the confusing, disorienting question posed to Eve by the devil recorded in Genesis 3:1. Furthermore, the devil will seek to discredit God. Contrast his bold assertion recorded in Genesis 3:4-5 with the command and warning of God recorded in Genesis 2:17. The implication of the devil’s (false) assertion is that man is independent of God; man need not fear God’s threatened judgment, and man must not allow God to selfishly deprive him of self-fulfillment. Finally, the devil will seek to appeal to your desires (note Genesis 3:6.)

We must take seriously the words of Genesis 3:1, *“the serpent [as the creature whom the devil employed] was more subtle than any beast of the field.”* Your adversary, the devil, will appear in the form of a bright, beautiful, fascinating

“serpent.” If you are not on guard, you will find yourself intrigued by this creature and his allurements. You will find yourself following this “serpent” off the pathway of righteousness and life into the open field—your sense of fear and apprehension being overcome by a sense of excitement and adventure. You will find yourself walking briskly through the high grass, trying to keep pace with this swiftly gliding “serpent.” Suddenly, he will have you running headlong through the underbrush and into the dense forest, and then he will have you at his mercy. Bear in mind that no matter how beautiful and fascinating he may appear, you are dealing with a deadly poisonous “serpent.” The Lord Jesus described the devil in these terms: *“the devil ... was a murderer from the beginning and is not established in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he is speaking in accordance with his own [nature], because he is a liar and the father of lies”* (Jn. 8:44.)

We must be on guard with respect to the devil’s objective: *“your adversary, the devil ... is ... looking for someone to devour.”* The term, “adversary,” is a legal term, it is referring to an opposing attorney in a court of law, one who seeks to produce a condemning verdict against you from the Judge, note Zechariah 3:1,3, *“Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him ... ³Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel.”*

Because the devil is our adversary, we must be on guard. We must resist, or, withstand him, by standing firm in the faith. We must ever rely upon and trust in our Advocate, (our Defense Attorney,) the Lord Jesus Christ, note 1 John 2:1b-2a, *“we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One, ²and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”* We must resist, or, withstand him, by submitting to God: *“Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Come near to God and he will come near to you”* (Jas. 4:7-8.)

II. Because the Devil is Your Adversary, ...You Must Rely upon God

Note the connection between verses 8-9 and verses 10-11, *“your adversary, the devil ... is ... looking for someone to devour ... But ... the God of all grace ... will personally restore you, support you, strength you, and establish you.”*

We must rely upon the Lord our God because He is *“the God of all grace.”* He will supply us with His strengthening grace to enable us to successfully face temptation, as the Apostle Paul directs Timothy: *“You then, my son, be strong with the grace that is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Tim. 2:1.) He will supply us with His sustaining grace to enable us to successfully withstand trials:

There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty. ²⁷The eternal God is your refuge, and

underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, "Destroy him!" (Deut. 33:26-27)

He will supply us with His sufficient grace; grace that is more than adequate for anything we are called upon to face or to endure; to this all-sufficient grace the Apostle Paul yielded himself: *"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest upon me"* (2 Cor. 12:9.)

We must rely upon the Lord our God, realizing that He has *"called you to his eternal glory in Christ."* That is to say, He will not allow the devil to prevail against us—because He has ordained for us to share with Christ in His divine glory. The words of Isaiah spoken in defiance of Israel's enemies as they sought to overwhelm God's Old Testament covenant people, may be our affirmation as well: *"Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted! Announce your plan, but it will not succeed! —for God is with us!"* (Isa. 8:10.) Our Lord Jesus exhorts us, *"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"* (Lk. 12:32.)

As Christians, we may be assured that the Lord will not forsake us, but that He will surely accomplish His divine purpose of bringing us into His eternal kingdom and glory by Christ our Savior. The Apostle Paul assures us that God *"will also confirm you to the end, [so that you may be] blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord"* (1 Cor. 1:8-9.)

We must rely upon the Lord our God, knowing that *"to him belongs the dominion forever."* God the Father raised Christ *"from the dead ... seating him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in this [present] age but also in the coming age. ²²And "he put all things in subjection under his feet," and he appointed him to be head over all things for the church"* (Eph. 1:20-22.)

At present Christ employs this divine power and authority to restrain the devil in his vicious assaults.

A missionary and a local pastor in Tahiti were walking through waist-high grass toward a small house that they wished to visit. They hadn't gotten far when they heard a low, throaty growl from the hidden depths of the grass. Stopping to listen, both felt a chill of fear.

Suddenly a Doberman pinscher leaped up and began bounding toward them, his sharp teeth bared in a formidable snarl. The missionary could see every detail as if in slow motion. He stood directly in the dog's path, paralyzed by fear.

As the Doberman made his final leap, so close the missionary could smell his foul breath, the dog's head was violently twisted to the side. Savagely slammed down on his back as if by some invisible hand, he lay stunned, feet waving in the air like an overturned beetle.

"Thank you, Lord!" the two men breathed in unison. Then the missionary saw what he had failed to notice because of his fear: the Doberman was on a chain.

Now when I feel the chilly hand of fear start to grip me, I remember that Doberman pinscher lying flat on his back, powerless. I picture Satan on a chain. As he lunges at me and tries to fill me with fear, he's thrown down. At the other end of the chain is the strong hand of the Lord, holding it fast in an unyielding grip. (*POWER*, 4/7/91, pp. 4-5)

At last the Lord Jesus will employ that divine power and authority entrusted to Him by God His Father to consign the devil to the place of judgment appointed for him: *"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever"* (Rev. 20:10.)

Because the devil is our adversary, we must rely upon the Lord our God.

Conclusion

Let us take heed to Peter's warning, *"Be alert. Your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, is prowling around, looking for someone to devour."*

Remember the account of those two African Christians: When they timidly addressed the stalking lion with the plea, "We beg you to leave us alone," he merely lowered his shaggy head and let out a vicious growl. But after they asked the Lord to come to their rescue, they addressed that lion with the almighty authority of God: "In the name of Jesus Christ, we command you to depart from us!" —and that lion departed. The Apostle Paul assures us, *"the Lord is faithful, and he will establish you and guard you from the evil one"* (2 Thess. 3:3.)