

# *Scouting the Spiritual Enemy*

## **Winning the Real Battle**

**1 Peter 5:8-11**  
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**Bethany Church**  
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Are you enjoying October baseball? I like the game within the game. Every batter is scouted for strengths, weaknesses and habits. Every pitcher is scouted. Players are positioned in the field and pitches are called by the catcher based on those scouting reports. Have you ever seen a scouting report? Every Monday, after football practice, a football scouting report mysteriously appears on our kitchen table. If I look in it, I can read about John Marshall High School's next opponent, what are their strengths, weaknesses and tendencies. What do they like to do? In sports, coaches always scout the opponent. They look for strengths, weaknesses and tendencies so that they can prepare to meet and beat the rival.

Scouting, however, is not limited to sports. After four planes were hijacked a year ago and used as weapons to bring down the World Trade towers and destroy the Pentagon, we painfully found out how critical it is to gather intelligence on our enemies. We need to know who they are, where they are, what they think, weapons they have, tactics they use, their aims and allies. Our nation uses satellites, planes, drones, spies, reconnaissance teams and more to scout our enemies. It's a major priority.

Interestingly, despite the fact that the Bible paints a picture of a war between two kingdoms and says much about the kingdom of darkness, many maintain that we don't need to know anything about our spiritual opposition. They say that all we need to do is study Jesus and become like Jesus. However, if we study Jesus, truly examine his life and teaching, we find that he took the enemy seriously, confronted the enemy directly, taught about the enemy's tactics and equipped his disciples to war against the enemy.

When Jesus lived, part of the scholarly community of Israel, the Sadducees, did not believe in spiritual beings. They did not believe in angels, demons, visions, dreams, or the eventual resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8). They were materialists, and they were moralists. In contrast, Jesus commissioned his followers to drive out the demons that the Sadducees didn't believe in (Matthew 10:1). He taught that the devil is a liar and the originator of all lies (John 8:44). He confronted Satan when he was tempted through Peter (Matthew 16:23). He spoke of what's needed to defeat demons on different occasions (for example, the strong power of the Spirit - Matthew 12:26-29, prayer - Luke 22:31-32, faith - Matthew 17:18-20). Moreover, Jesus entrusted his disciples with the responsibility of teaching others, so we must look at their words as a window to Jesus' point of view.

In John, chapter ten, when Jesus declares that he has come to bring us life so that we live life to the full, he contrasts himself with a thief who comes to do three things, steal, kill and destroy. Why does Jesus contrast himself with a thief if there is none out there to fear? Is not he speaking of Satan who feeds off God's sheep like a thieving wolf, and does he not stand in contrast as the good shepherd? When Peter in his first epistle speaks of Satan as a prowling, hungry lion ready to devour us, does that not sound like

the thieving wolf who comes to steal, kill and destroy? I remind you that Peter partnered with Jesus in ministry for three years. Jesus was his tutor. The warning that we face a ravenous, devouring beast is not original with Peter. This idea is from Jesus and is offered as scouting report. Moreover, the Bible teaches how this beast operates and how we can defeat it.

In previous weeks, we already discussed the spiritual aims of God and the devil. God's aim is to reconcile you as a partner and restore you as a ruler over your life and this world. You were created for partnership, and you were created for dominion on this earth. You were made in the image of God. The devil's aim is to divide your partnership with God and subvert your dominion. By eroding your confidence in God's love for you, the devil separates you from God and exercises dominion over your thinking and through your actions.

With this aim in mind, the attacks of the ravenous wolf or devouring lion come in three ways. **The first is spirit to spirit.** This is the struggle that Jesus had both in the wilderness when he was tempted, and also in the garden when he asked the father to remove the cup of suffering from him. In the garden of Gethsemene, the spirit of fear tried to drive a wedge in Jesus' trust of his father. You and I encounter this inner battle. We're taking a test and the answers on someone's paper is exposed. Do we look? Do we copy? Do we fudge our numbers on our income tax form? Do we excuse ourselves from tithing? That's a spirit to spirit attack. It's always a matter of trust in God's love for us and his word to us. Satan always says, "*Did God really say? Did God really say you are not to eat the fruit of the garden?*" "Spirit to spirit" attacks saddle us with worry, discouragement, self-doubt and many other debilitating attitudes. They always erode our

confidence in God's love, and they always lead to the dismissal of God's word. This is always the work of the wolf trying to latch on to us. Are you embracing or dismissing the Bible's teachings? Are there commands you technically fulfill, but not with your whole heart? Someone could even accuse you of fudging? You're being attacked "spirit to spirit."

**The second type of attack is spirit through person.** This is what Jesus encountered through the chief priests, Roman officials and even his closest disciple, Peter. This is what Job suffered from the Sabeans and the Chaldeans who seized his property and later from his friends who accused him of wrong-doing. This is what a missionary family encountered in the Philippines earlier this year when a militant group kidnapped the couple and the husband was gunned down when the Philippine army tried to liberate them. This is what you and I encounter every day with lustful and value-busting TV programming, with popular music lyrics, and with sarcasm or the poor counsel of peers. The claw of the lion swipes at us through another person's drunk driving or other lapses in their judgment.

**The third form of attack is spirit through nature.** This is seen in the storms that killed Job's children and destroyed Job's crops and animals. It is observed in a storm that Jesus rebuked exactly in the same manner that he rebuked evil spirits. It's further witnessed in the illnesses that debilitated people of the Bible. For example, Jesus heals a woman who is stooped over, and attributes her condition to Satan. Peter in summarizing the ministry of Jesus to Cornelius and the first Gentile audience says:

***You know... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil...*** (Acts 10:37-38)

Peter summarizes Jesus' ministry with the words "*doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil.*" He sees Jesus liberating people from Satan's work in healing them of their illnesses. He's freeing them from the influence or power of Satan's work on their body. This viewpoint is also visible in Paul's teaching. In 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul advises the church to hand a rebellious man over to Satan so that his flesh may be destroyed but his spirit saved. He does this again in 1 Timothy chapter one to Hymenaeus and Alexander. In other words, Peter, Paul and Jesus all view Satan as a spirit that on occasion is able to attack the body just like Job experienced when his protection was removed and sores broke out on his body.

Does this mean that colds, flu, cancer and the like are attacks of Satan? Does this mean a deer on the road is an attack of Satan? Does this mean a hailed out crop is the work of Satan? Does this mean drought, floods, and early frosts that damage crops are the acts of Satan? Have I opened up Pandora's Box here? Isn't there something impersonal at work like *time and chance*? Didn't Solomon and the Bible teach this in Ecclesiastes 9 when he wrote:

***I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.***  
(Ecclesiastes 9:11, NIV)

Solomon recognized that there were forces at work beyond our ability to dissect and beyond our power to control. He finally in Ecclesiastes comes to the conclusion that we need to focus trust in God and our life-activity must be submitted to God. Only in our relationship with God do we have true security and contentment. Solomon is pointing to that truth rather than teaching about some impersonal force.

However, when it comes to illnesses and disasters, all of us, including nature, are under the sentence of death because of the original sin. Dominion was lost in the Garden of Eden, and it will be fully restored back to us through our resurrection in Jesus Christ. In the meantime we are in a fight that demonstrates to our enemy that his total defeat is approaching, that he already is losing dominion over us and nature, and that he will soon lose it all. The game plan is to partner with Christ in experiencing personal redemption and to partner with Christ in bringing about the redemption of people and the land we have defiled. When we partner with Christ, we can be certain that regardless of the attack, God's loving plan includes us, God's loving plan enfolds us, and God's loving plan will triumph through us.

In scouting our spiritual enemy we simply receive Christ's instruction for meeting and beating an enemy who fears our partnership with God. Martin Luther wrote of the devil in his great hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, "For lo, his doom is sure!" We are in this fight with that destiny.