

SESSION 6



KNOWING OUR ENEMY

Introduction

Throughout Scripture we are enlightened to the epic cosmic battle that has raged since the fall of man: good and evil, Heaven and Hell, God and His nemesis, the devil. The Bible uses a number of names to allude to the devil. He is called 'our adversary' (1 Peter 5:8), 'Beelzebub' (Matthew 12:24), the 'evil one' (John 17:15), 'Father of Lies' (John 8:44), 'the ruler of darkness', 'ruler of demons' and 'ruler of this world'. Why is this relevant to our discussion?

A key strategy of any army's defence is to 'know the enemy'; to study their tactics and so be as prepared as possible to face the onslaught of attack.

Focus

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12).

Can we be in any doubt that we are in flat out war? Why is Jesus so careful to explain the parable of the weeds in Matthew?

"The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil . . ."

Matthew 13:37–39

So what does the devil want? We can imagine that his aim is twofold.

Firstly, he wants anyone who isn't yet a believer in the Lord to stay that way. If that fails and a person gives his or her life to Christ then his second aim comes into play: he wants to make those who believe in the Lord ineffective in their service for Him. He wants to make sure that we play no further part in bringing others to know God. He wants to shut us up and stop us from ever proclaiming the Gospel. To win a battle all the devil need do is bring the Christian to a point where they fail to recognise the war and see no need to fight this spiritual battle. It's a stealth attack that is largely going unnoticed by the Church, and is therefore deadly.

A well known comic strip features a little boy turning to his father, with a Bible in his hand, and saying to his dad: 'Daddy, I looked at the back and we win'

This is so true. We *do* have the advantage. When we look into the Scriptures we can see what is in store for the devil. Revelation tells us of the devil's pending fate:

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Revelation 20:10

Ultimately the devil is destined to perish. However, before that happens he is going to fight as hard as he can to bring other people to that same fate. He is going to fight to keep the eyes of the non-Christians blinded to the saving power of the Gospel. Matthew 24:14 gives us an indication of the end of days. It tells us that the Gospel '... will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.' At the end of days the devil will be thrown into that lake of fire. What greater motivation does he need, then, to stop us telling people about Jesus!

Where the Lord says that He is '... not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance' (2 Peter 3:9), the devil's plans are polar-opposite. He wants everyone in this world to perish with him and he doesn't want anyone to repent. It is our responsibility to share the message of redemption with the world. We are God's spokespeople in this lost and dying world. Are we going to stay silent or are we going to fight?

Discussion

1. What does 1 Peter 5:8 tell us about the devil? How should we respond to this warning?
2. In the light of Matthew 24:14 (the fact that once everyone hears the Gospel the end will come), what do you think the devil does to stop Christians proclaiming the Gospel?
3. What do you think we can do to protect ourselves from the devil's schemes? Look at Ephesians 6:11–24 and 1 Peter 5:8–11
4. What courage can we take from 1 John 4:4? Consider making note of other similarly reassuring verses.

Bible Parallel

Read Genesis 3:1–19, 23–24 and Matthew 4:1–11, 17

These passages depict two of the greatest temptation scenes recorded in Scripture. Both also reveal and identify Satan as the ‘tempter’ who is sly, subtle and serious.

As we examine the way Satan tempted both Adam and Eve and then Jesus, we note that temptation is almost always linked to our obedience. We can also draw similar parallels in the tactics employed by the ‘tempter’ who preys on 3 specific areas:

1. Physical Needs (Genesis 1:6, Matthew 4:2–3)
2. Pride (Genesis 1:5, Matthew 4:6)
3. Power and Covetousness (Genesis 1:6, Matthew 4:9)

The stark difference in these passages is found in the way we respond when tempted – whether we succumb to the scream for satisfaction of the flesh or whether we keep our eyes firmly fixed on the Father.

In Genesis 1, a single command was defied by a single temptation that led to a single devastating result. By contrast, in Matthew 4, Jesus sees through Satan’s trap in all three instances (verses 4, 7, 10) and accordingly models for us that being satisfied in God is better than being satisfied in any other thing this world has to offer. He answers each time, tackling each temptation, with His knowledge of Scripture, so embracing only His mission – the way of the cross.

Hebrews refers to Jesus as the one who has been tempted in every respect, just as we are – yet He led a life without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Christ leaves us an example that we should aim to follow His steps (1 Peter 2:21) and walk in the same way as He walked (1 John 2:6).

Further discussion and personal contemplation

Temptations are not merely an instrument to make us commit sin. More so, they serve as distractions from achieving the purpose to which God has called us. Matthew 4 tells us that after three unsuccessful attempts to entice Jesus in the wilderness, Satan leaves and immediately Jesus moves out to begin His ministry. Discuss the significance of how this impacts the call of God upon your life to be a light in the world and identify the things that can possibly serve to distract you from your central vocation.