

Resisting your enemy

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

1 Peter 5:8-9

In South Africa, and particularly in Johannesburg, we know all about danger. When in your car, there is the ever-present danger of being hijacked, or experiencing a smash and grab. Our roads themselves are dangerous and there is a threat of an accident. If you are out of the car, there is the danger your car will be stolen. If you are on foot, there is the danger of being mugged for your wallet, cell phone or jewellery. At home there is the danger of a housebreaking while you are gone, or even a house-jacking while you are there.

Because of the pervasive danger, people take various precautions and actions, like having anti-hijacking devices on the cars, immobilisers, trackers, gear-locks and steering locks. Some cars fit anti-smash and grab film on the car windows. Some just don't ever drive at night, or drive very little at all. When walking, some carry mace, some carry guns, some don't walk with any valuable, some just don't ever walk.

At home, we have bars on our windows, walls, electric gates, electric fences, armed response security systems, dogs, CCTV cameras, and many homeowners arm themselves. Many move into security complexes. Many leave the cities. Many leave the country. The point is – we do these things because the threat is real. There is a real danger. We would not take precautions like this if it was imaginary. Being naturally self-protective, we take measures to avoid being harmed or having our possessions stolen or damaged.

Our passage in **1 Peter 5:8-9** has the same thinking. It tells us to take various actions because there is a very real danger – the danger of the devil. He is not imaginary, so acting in the right way is sensible and intelligent, given who he is. So I want us to see two things in the passage – the danger we face, and the action we are to take.

The danger we face

1. The devil is real

Peter says without apology: *“your adversary the devil walks about.”* Peter, like every other New Testament writer – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James and Jude – writes of the Devil as a real, personal being. He is described as someone who has intelligence – Paul talks about His schemes and His subtility. He is described as having emotions – John describes him being angry. He is described as having a will – he has definite plans as we see even in this Scripture.

Some liberal scholars have made out that there is no such person as Satan. They say he is just a picture of evil – the personification of evil. But in this Scripture, it is clear God is not telling us to be on our guard against our own evil. He has already told us that in **1 Peter 2:11**. No – this is a person. He is real. And the Bible calls Him *“your adversary.”*

He is your opponent because he used to be your father but is now your sworn enemy. How much greater is the hatred when we used to be in his family, and now are the adopted children of *his* enemy – the great Yahweh, the Great I AM.

An enemy is one who hates you, and seeks your harm. He wants to see your downfall. He stands against you. He seeks to thwart your efforts to glorify God and spread your faith. In fact, the word “devil” literally means slanderer or accuser. He accuses you and I to God, seeking our destruction or condemnation.

The two extremes in studying the person of Satan are both wrong. The one extreme focuses such attention on him so as to give him glory and make out that God is not sovereign. It ends up making spiritual warfare something very superstitious. The other extreme is to act like the devil is just a Bible personality, like Abraham, Saul or Enoch – to think, ‘they’re good to know about, but they can’t really affect me.’

The truth is the Devil is real. And if you think he has not noticed you – you are wrong. The Word of God says that the devil is *your* adversary. The day you received Christ, you became his enemy, and he became yours.

2. The devil is restless

Peter here describes the devil as a lion on the prowl. Now a restless lion is more dangerous than a contented one. A restless lion is seeking prey. The phrase in **1 Peter** of ‘walking up and down in it’ not only refers to activity, but to ownership. Satan is described as the god of this world. He is the rebel lord of his own world system which mankind buys into – thereby following him. We see some of this restlessness conveyed in Job and Amos.

The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.”

Job 1:7

Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?

Amos 3:4

Why would he be restless? I believe part of the answer is in Revelation 12:12:

Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

Revelation 12:12

His time is short. He knows every moment brings the world closer to the return of Jesus Christ. His time to deceive, destroy and keep as many people out of the kingdom of God as possible is limited. That makes him restless, perhaps all the more diligent, purposeful and determined.

3. The devil is ravenous

The Bible chooses to describe the devil as a lion. That’s interesting, because Christ is also called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Why use the symbol of a lion when it has already been used to refer to Christ? Because a lion is the best way to describe the dangerous nature of Satan.

Lions are wild animals and will kill their prey. As the lion is the king of the beasts, so Satan was the anointed cherub, more than likely the most exalted angel. As a lion prowls around with no animal competitor, so Satan walks up and down the earth, unchallenged – only God can stop him. A lion is powerful, ferocious and deadly. Make no mistake, Satan is not a baddy from a comic book who just helps the story along. As Jesus said of Satan:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him...

John 8:44

You only become a murderer once you have killed. You are a murderer in your heart when you hate someone and a murderer in deed when you kill. Satan hates, and Satan kills. He kills in the worst sense – cutting off people's chance to receive eternal life – so that they will experience eternal death in hell. Our passage in 1 Peter says very clearly, he is *"seeking whom he may devour."* The word for devour means to swallow whole – to gulp down. That speaks of Satan seeking to finish you, to destroy you, to end your life altogether.

Imagine you know there was a serial killer walking in your area. What kind of caution would you take? Know with the devil that there is a killer on the loose. We have a real enemy, a restless enemy and a ravenous enemy. But that leads us to ask the question – isn't Satan already defeated by God? If so, then surely there is no danger?

Why should I be vigilant if Satan is defeated?

Satan is dethroned but is still dangerous. He has been beaten, but not eliminated. Here we have to touch on one of the most difficult subject in the Bible – God's sovereignty over Satan, and Satan's rebellion toward God. Satan is not a servant of God in a deliberate, submissive sense. But yet, he cannot do just as he pleases. We see in the book of Job that God had put a hedge around Job – Satan says it is God who must put forth His hand, and then God gives Satan permission, with limits.

"Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

Job 1:10-12

You see this again in **Job 2:6**: *"And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life."* Likewise in **Luke 22:31**: *"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat."* Here Satan seems to have asked to tempt the disciples, and Jesus prays for Peter himself. The point here is that Satan has to ask.

So Satan is limited by God. He has been defeated by God, but he is not a harmless foe. He can and does still destroy, deceive and defeat. Because he is God's enemy, future doom for him is sure – but that does not mean he cannot do much damage between now and then. While this damage is under God's control – it is still God in His Word who says, 'be careful.'

To disregard this caution from the Bible would be like having a bodyguard who says, 'Fasten your seatbelt,' and then you say, 'I don't have to, I trust you to protect me.' That would be both presumptuous and foolish. When the One protecting you gives you commands – that is part of the way He protects you. And only because Satan is a real danger, are these commands given. This then brings us to the responsibility we have.

The responsibility we have

The first command we receive here is to be sober, which we could paraphrase as, 'be clear-headed in your thinking.' This means, let your mind be saturated with God's thoughts so that your thoughts are balanced, wise and free from error. Consider these passages:

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ...

1 Peter 1:13

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

1 Peter 4:7

Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

1 Thessalonians 5:6-8

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he...

Proverbs 23:7

Satan's primary attack is on our belief system. What we think about God shapes our entire lives. So the primary way of facing the enemy is to have a mind renewed by the Word of God. Remember, Satan's first tactic is never intimidation, it is deceit. There is no need to kick the door down if you can convince the person to open it from the inside. Satan did not first scare Eve, he tricked her. That's why 2 Corinthians says:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...

2 Corinthians 10:5-6

What is spiritual warfare? Shouting at demons? Rebuking and binding Satan? Casting out spirits left, right and centre? No – it is casting down arguments, pulling down strongholds of thought – that is flawed attitudes and belief systems, and then bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The more we understand the Word of God, the doctrines of the Word, the character and nature of our God, the less likely we are to fall to Satan's first tactic – to deceive us.

Take note that Satan always uses the same approach as with Eve. He says, 'What God said isn't true. God isn't doing enough for you. For you to be happy, fulfilled, satisfied, secure, you are going to have to do something other than what God said. God is just selfish, you see. He doesn't want competitors. So come on – if God isn't going to totally take care of you, then you'd better.'

And when we buy into unbelief, what comes next is pride – 'I will, and I shall... for myself, by myself.' But once we have bitten into that fruit – we realise who was lying. We realise who really was exploiting us, who was really in it for himself. You cannot, and will not, resist the temptations of Satan apart from thinking that is sober, clear and Biblically-informed.

What Satan tempted Jesus, how did He respond? With philosophy? With practical arguments? With high-sounding statements about how He wanted to not fall into sin? No, Jesus responded with Scripture each time. "It is written... It is written... It is written..." I love what Charles Spurgeon said about having this kind of mind and in particular, what Spurgeon said about John Bunyan:

Oh, that you and I might get into the very heart of the Word of God, and get that Word into ourselves! As I have seen the silkworm eat into the leaf, and consume it, so ought we to do with the Word of the Lord — not crawl over its surface, but eat right into it till we have taken it into our inmost parts. It is idle merely to let the eye glance over the words, or to recollect the poetical expressions, or the historic facts; but it is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in Scriptural language, and your very style is fashioned upon Scripture models, and, what is better still, your spirit is flavoured with the words of the Lord.

I would quote John Bunyan as an instance of what I mean. Read anything of his, and you will see that it is almost like the reading the Bible itself. He had read it till his very soul was saturated with Scripture; and, though his writings are charmingly full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his Pilgrim's Progress — that sweetest of all prose poems — without continually making us feel and say, "Why, this man is a living Bible!" Prick him anywhere — his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God. I commend his example to you, beloved.

The second command we are given in our passage from **1 Peter** is to be vigilant — that is, to be watchful and alert. The idea is: do not fall into a state of spiritual lukewarmness and casualness that could cause your ruin. To use an everyday example — you don't sleep when you think there is danger nearby. And if sleep is a metaphor for being spiritually apathetic, bored, nonchalant or careless, then the Bible is saying, 'If you know the danger of Satan, then don't sleep.'

When you know there is a danger — you do two things. You identify what form the danger might take, and you take necessary precautions. If you know the burglar may come through the windows, you put bars there. In the same way, we ought to know how Satan works.

Know what his tactics are: unbelief and fear. Know he uses the same three-pronged attack — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (**1 John 2:16**). Know that he will attack you not in your strongest area, but in your weakest. Know that he is always working to keep your pride alive, so you will not turn to God.

Interestingly, this is how you overcome fear. If Satan cannot deceive you, he will try to scare you. If a lion cannot creep up on a prey successfully, he may roar to paralyse it with fear. But being cautious is not the same thing as being jumpy, anxious or jittery. A soldier goes into battle with caution, but with bravery. Know your enemy. Know what he is capable of. Know how he tries to deceive or to intimidate. Be alert and awake, and you will not be overcome or in a state of panic if his attack comes.

The third command given in our 1 Peter passage here is to resist and remain firm in the faith. We could paraphrase this as: 'Be courageous.' Resist here means to withstand or oppose. It has more of a defensive idea than an offensive idea. Be firm against onset, rather than setting up actual battle. Take a stand against him. This stands in contrast with a host of unbiblical spiritual warfare attitudes today.

How does one resist Satan?

There are a number of unbiblical methods, which include: binding and rebuking Satan; praying on the high places of the city, casting out 'spirit of ...', breaking generational curses, finding out the territorial spirit and rebuking him, confessing the sins of your ancestors to break generational curses, pleading the blood of Jesus – all these 'methods' find little or no Scripture to support them.

I picture Satan advancing on a town with his forces. There he sees a bunch of enemy soldiers turning circles, talking into the air, stamping on the ground etc. His response? Laughter, and perhaps some assistance to keep the illusion going. In the meantime, he moves in to conquer the town of 'Man's soul,' while the soldiers carry on their superstitious little activities.

The Bible does not command us to take Satan on. It commands us to refuse to allow Satan to take us down. And how do we do this? James gives the same instruction, but with an additional command which sheds light on what it means to resist Satan: *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,"* (James 4:7).

The way you resist Satan is by submitting to God. When you obey God in dependence on him, you are in the safest and strongest place possible – you are filled with the Spirit and in the centre of His will. That's why Satan will flee from you.

In fact, if you remember all the pieces of our spiritual armour in **Ephesians 6**, the thing they all have in common is that they are aspects of character. The helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes of readiness, the shield of faith, the belt of truth. What are all those things? They are issues of obedience, of submission. The more you submit to God, the more God grows your faith, your godliness, your readiness, your truthfulness, your assurance of salvation.

It's just like everything else in the Christian life – the paradoxes. You humble yourself to be exalted, you die to self to truly live, you surrender to gain victory, you give up to gain, you empty yourself to be filled. In the same way – you overcome Satan not by attacking him with a barrage of verbal insults, but by focusing instead on God and His Word and His will.

Peter tells us how to do that. He says, be 'steadfast in the faith' – that is, be firm in the faith. Know that you have a rock-solid foundation. One of the secrets of the success of the Roman army was their shoes. They had a very thick-soled semi-boot. On the bottom of the sole were pieces of metal, spikes that would give a soldier a firm footing in battle. It also prevented enemy spikes from piercing their feet. Even the best soldier is incapacitated if he can't stand. So we take our position of courageous submission to God from a firm foundation – the faith we have from God.

Sometimes submitting to God can be very tough. The one advantage Satan has is that we have a sinful nature, so his temptations seem much easier than submission to God. So if you are not going to slip on the battlefield – you need to dig your heels in, and resist firmly. That's why the Word says, 'be courageous.' Take heart, defy yourself, defy the devil, defy the world, and submit to God.

Then Peter adds an interesting phrase: *"knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."* Why would this help one resist Satan? Because it reminds you that your difficulties are not unique. You are not Satan's only target – believers worldwide are experiencing persecution, temptation and false teaching.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

I once had a teacher who decided he had to cane the whole class. So he lined us up alphabetically and caned us one by one. Well, that had the opposite effect. Instead of making us feel guilty, we felt strengthened – encouraged, galvanised, united. There was a sense of togetherness in our group spanking! Knowing that believers worldwide are experiencing the anger of Satan gives us a sense of unity, identity and assurance that encourages us to press on and keep submitting to God.

Some suffering is indeed caused by Satan but permitted and used by God. Satan seeks the trial to destroy us, but Job shows how God uses the same thing to build us.

If I was in Lebanon right now, travelling with an Israeli army unit, I would in one sense feel protected – they are using their military might to fight off any threats. But at the same time, if they said to me, ‘Keep your head down’ or ‘Put on this gas mask on’ – I would do it – because obeying those commands form part of my protection.

Can a true believer be destroyed by Satan? No, but a true believer exercises is responsibility. Just like **1 Peter 1:5** says, “*Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*” So, a true believer cannot lose their salvation because they are kept by the power of God, but they are kept through faith. For a believer to say, ‘I will stop believing, and God will still save me’ is foolish.

So God says, ‘Yes, Satan is defeated, but he is still dangerous. He cannot do more than I allow him to, but I may allow him to do things which will purge you, like with Job.’ So, for your own safety, be clear-thinking, be cautious and be courageous.