

This morning we're continuing our study on Ephesians 6:10-13 which deals with spiritual warfare. We are spending several weeks on this subject for two main reasons.

First, our text in Ephesians 6 makes it unavoidable. It deals directly with **"the schemes of the devil."**

Of my own initiative, I don't think I would have chosen to do a sermon series on spiritual warfare, but because we are following the text of Ephesians, we must. And therein lies the problem ... which leads us to the second reason we are spending several weeks on this subject.

In our modern age, we give far too little attention to the reality of spiritual warfare. I suspect this is because we are more informed by our culture and the current climate of thought regarding the supernatural than we are informed by the scriptures and by prayer.

If you're like me, you probably find biblical references to the devil and his demonic forces startling.

In the Old Testament, Satan is not referred to a great deal. But when he is referred to, he plays a significant role. Genesis 3, which deals with the fall of man is the greatest example of this. Satan was the conduit through which all sin entered the world. Yet in the Old Testament, on the whole, satan is not referred to very frequently.

However in the New Testament, the devil and his minions are frequently mentioned. In the Gospels, the devil and his servants are on virtually every page. In Acts and in the Epistles the devil is likewise referred to numerous times. And then we come to Revelation. There the devil is depicted for who he really is and that is the great adversary of God.

And so, when we consider the scriptures as a whole, the devil plays a very significant role. Yet we don't often take the reality of the devil seriously enough.

When it comes to sin and evil, our focus tends to be limited to our personal sin struggles and the sin in the world. These are the struggles that are most real to us. Yet the bible tells us that our struggle with sin is more complex than we can directly see.

The devil is real and he works evil in our lives and in our world. And the devil wants us to minimize him. He wants us to underestimate him.

And because our culture predisposes us to doubt the super-natural, it is easy for us to make spiritual warfare an afterthought.

This we do to our own spiritual peril. Underestimating your enemy is a deadly mistake.

Think about it, if you over-estimate your enemy, you bring too much attention to the fight and waste your resources. But the end result is that you will probably still prevail. But if you underestimate your enemy, the odds of you losing against him are far higher.

Most Christians today underestimate our enemy, the devil. Ephesians 6 aids us in having a right estimation of the devils craft and power. So, let us read Ephesians 6:10-13. Paul writes:

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

This is God's word. The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

One resource that has been especially helpful to me in our study of Ephesians has been Martyn Lloyd-Jones's sermons. And in his sermons, he devoted nearly 400 pages to the four verses we just read.

One analogy that he made between our enemy the devil and our estimation of him came from Great Britain's experience during the Second World War. After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Great Britain declared war on Germany. And while this was alarming at first, over the subsequent months, the British people failed to take the war seriously enough. And so, to correct this, Major General Sir Ernest Swinton took to the airwaves to remind the people that the war threat was very real and very grave even though it was not yet being felt by the British. He said to the great astonishment of the British people in 1940: "We are fighting for our very lives." To many he seemed unduly alarmist. Yet looking back, we know that he was correct. The British people were in the fight of their lives.

The same is true for us in the church. In Ephesians 6, and at many other places in the New Testament, we are reminded that when it comes to the devil, "We are fighting for our very lives." Warfare is terrible. It always is. And the scriptures tell us that as believers, we are engaged in a **most terrible war**. To not recognize this is to almost certainly be defeated.

And so we must know our enemy.

The one whom Luther called "Our Ancient Foe."
The scriptures most often refer to him as the devil or satan.
He takes many forms and has many tactics.
We will examine a few of them.

You have a sermon outline printed in your bulletin and the first point there is...
I. The Devil's Forms and Schemes

The first place we find the devil in scripture is in Genesis 3. It says in verse 1:
Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"

Now, when we consider this first form of the devil, he is a serpent.
Certainly he was not created as a serpent.
He was created as an angel or some other sort of ministering spirit of God.
Yet he rebelled against his original role that God had for him.
This of course he did through God's predestined design. God is sovereign over all things- and satan's rebellion is part of God sovereign plan.

Now, where do we go to prove that satan is a fallen angel?
There is a bit of imprecision here but I believe Revelation 12 is instructive.
It says:
Revelation 12:3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. **4** His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.

The thought is that the dragon is satan and the stars of heaven that he brought down to earth are the other demonic underlings that he brought with him in his rebellion.

Another proof text comes from 1 Timothy 3:6.
There it says,
6 [An elder] must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

The devil's condemnation lies in his being given a level of authority and power in the spiritual realm.
Yet he used his authority and power to seek his own kingdom and not God's.
There are other places in scripture that refer to the origins of the devil yet none of them are as clear as we might like them to be.
But this we know, the devil is created, he is spiritual and he can take various forms.
We believe he was originally good, yet like the elder who is a recent convert, his power and authority went to his head and he began to serve his own ends.

A. A Crafty Serpent

The first time we see the devil in scripture, he is in the form of a serpent.
Now Eve was not repulsed by the serpent or even shocked that he spoke to her.
Instead she found him worth listening to.
Therefore we can assume that serpent was not ugly or threatening.
Satan could have taken the form of an imposing serpent, but instead he took the form of one who was **seemingly harmless**.
All the animals were harmless in those days and so we might assume that the serpent's form was even a bit cute.

And in this form of a harmless serpent, he spoke to Eve. Now, what Eve doesn't know is that he is "more crafty than any other beast of the field."
This means that he is sly. He's subtle.
He's able to twist things and manipulate information.
He not a straight shooter.
He withholds pertinent information and presents only that information that furthers his ends.

And Eve bought his lies and twisted logic, hook, line and sinker.
Eve had no idea who she was dealing with.
The serpent was so cunning, he was able to bring Eve to a place where she trusted... herself.
She trusted her own intellect and problem solving skills instead of trusting the Lord.
She was no match for the intellect and ruthlessness of the serpent.

And so we learn from this that Satan is smarter than anyone of us.
Our only hope is to trust in God's word.
There are so many ways that satan can talk us into sin.
There are so many ways he can get us to doubt the veracity of God's word or distrust God's goodness.

Our only hope in dealing with Satan is to trust God's word and not lean on our own understanding.
Satan is not one to be reasoned with.
He will out-reason us every time unless we are reasoning faithfully from God's revealed word.

The devil is subtle.
He's not harmless like he sometimes pretends to be.
He's crafty and cunning... and he is ruthless.

A **second** major form that the devil takes is that of ...
B. An Angel of Light

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul speaks about the false apostles that the Corinthians are fond of listening to.
And he compares their smooth and attractive approach to that of Satan.
He says:
13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. **14** And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. **15** So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.

You see this!
Satan takes the form of one who is attractive, good-righteous even.

And this means he can appeal to us through our natural love for those things that are beautiful, good and even partly true. This is the case in the realm of religion but it is also the case in every realm of temptation.

Satan can tempt us in the most beautiful and virtuous ways!

One place where I see him doing this today is in our culture's embrace of love and peace and kindness. Now showing love and peace and kindness are all really good things as far as they go. Yet our culture believes in these ideals to an ultimate degree.

They are ends in and of themselves instead of the glory being the chief end.

When people believe that they are doing a good job at showing love and peace and kindness, they become impervious to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Such people don't take kindly to being classified as hopelessly sinful.

And in the church, our repentance is often cold because we don't think we are really all that bad. This is true if we accept the culture's view of morality. Yet when we examine the scriptures, we see that we fall hopelessly short of God's standards.

Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. He tempts us away from following Christ by appealing to our love of high ideals and good behavior. He wants us to pursue the "good" instead of pursuing Christ.

Satan wants us to strive to be loving, peaceful and kind so that we would be content with ourselves. He wants us to pursue beauty, goodness and truth, and not Christ himself.

Satan can appear attractive and good like an angel of light.

He can appear harmless and subtle like serpent.

And finally, Satan can take the form of a roaring lion.

C. A Roaring Lion

In 1 Peter 5:8, Peter writes:

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

And this refers to the brutal dragon-like quality Satan can employ.

Lions are brutal and they attack with great ferocity.

When Satan tempts us or comes at us like a lion, he appeals to that which is the worst in us.

Our violent natures or our most sinful impulses.

Or his attack can come in the form of powerful persecution which causes great suffering.

Whenever the church is shut down or shut out, this is Satan working in the form of a lion.

Whenever Christians are marginalized, mocked or harmed for their faith, this is Satan the lion.

Needless to say, this is Satan's most evident form and so he reserves this form for those instances where he thinks he can get away with it.

And Peter's word to us when Satan comes at us like a lion is this:

9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

The lion form of Satan reveals his most naked desire and that is to separate people from God.

Because his essential desire is to separate people from God, his primary targets are the church, her ministers and her members.

If he can drag them off or destroy them, he is content.

And so we have to be watchful.

He is a determined enemy.

He is more intelligent than any of us individually or all of us together.

He is more powerful than we are and he is more ruthless than we can imagine.

He can be subtle. He can be beautiful or He can be brutal.

He'll do whatever it takes to separate us from the love of God.

Knowing our adversary as such should drive us all the more to trust in Christ.

Paul wrote in Romans 8:35

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? **36** As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

Romans 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, **nor angels nor rulers**, nor things present nor things to come, **nor powers**, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Notice how he referred to neither angels, nor rulers, nor powers.

There are angels, rulers and powers that seek to separate us from God.

Yet through Christ we are more than conquerors.

And this brings us to our second and final point which is

II. The Devil's Power and Dominion

It is shocking to see how the scriptures speak of the power and dominion of the devil.

In Ephesians 2:2 he is referred to as:

the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience

In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul speaks of him in even stronger language by calling him the "god of this world." He says:

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. **4** In their case **the god of this world** has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them

from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

But the apostle John speaks most strongly of the devil's power and dominion in 1 John 5:19.

He writes:

1 John 5:19 We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

What power and reach the devil has!
The whole world lies in his power!

God has given the devil an extremely long leash. And this explains the delusion of the devil. In Satan's arrogance, he does not understand that he is a subordinate and defeated foe. He pride blinds him from the fact that he is no match for God. He actually believes he stands a chance against God.

Consider how the devil tempted Jesus in Matthew 4. Satan must have come in to that meeting with such confidence. And why not, he had been successful against every other saint in all history past. From Adam and Eve, to Noah, to Abraham, David and the prophets, Satan had influenced all of them to sin greatly.

And his success must have gone to his head. Yet Jesus was different because He is God the son. Jesus withstood Satan's temptations. Yet this did not mean the devil just gave up. Instead, he doubled and tripled down. Through direct demonic activity by working through the earthly authorities like the scribes, pharisees and the Roman government, Satan sought to oppose Christ and his kingdom. All to no avail. Christ was perfectly successful. And even at the end, Satan inspired Judas to sell Jesus out. In both Luke's and John's gospel, we are told that Satan entered into Judas before his betrayal. For Satan, Christ's condemnation on the cross was victory. That was the best case scenario for Satan. He thought he was successful as Jesus was falsely tried, beaten and crucified. Satan thought his plan worked to perfection. **Yet Satan's plan was God's plan.** God humiliated Satan by working him like a marionette.

Acts 2:23 tells us that "Jesus, [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."

The devil's plan was God's plan.

This is why in Colossians 2:15, Paul writes:

15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

God triumphed over the rulers and authorities- that is the devil and his angels - and put them to open shame in the cross of Christ.

Open shame.

God humiliated the devil.

Beat him for all of heaven and earth to see.

9 ... God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Satan is defeated, yet he remains unbowed. In his delusional arrogance, he does not know that he is hopelessly defeated. And so he continues to rage even though his days are numbered.

Revelation 20:10 tells us about his sure doom. He and all his host will be thrown into the lake of fire. **Revelation 20:10** the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

I love how Luther summarizes the situation in verse 3 of a mighty fortress:

3. And though this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, For lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

God will destroy Satan in his time, when he wants to. And he will do so with a word.

Yet in the meantime, we must contend with the devil. And the way that we can stand against him is not through our own might or power. It is as we are anchored in God's word and in Jesus Christ. In ourselves, we are no match for Satan. He is smarter, more powerful and more ruthless than we can imagine. There is nothing he won't do. No tactic he won't employ. His methods are terrible.

It is only as we trust in Christ and his word that we shall be able to stand. And in him we can do more than stand. We can even take back that which Satan calls his own. Remember, Luke 11 tells us that Satan is the strong man who is bound. He is not in control like he once was. Christ has bound him and today is the day where we can raid his plunder.

And the Lord's supper is a grand display of this. The Lord's supper is a sign which tells us that... **13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.** And if the Lord can rescue us, he can rescue anyone. This is our mission. To make disciples because the strong man has been bound.

Let us pray and turn our attention to the body and blood of Christ.