

Go for the Gold Series:
Becoming Acquainted with our Opponent
Ephesians 6:10-20

July 29, 2012

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Introduction: We continue a series today on “Becoming Spiritual Champions.” The Olympic Games are crowning athletic champions, but God has called us to be spiritual champions. We said last week that in order to be a spiritual champion, we must realize the seriousness of our Christian commitment. Today, we consider how we must become familiar with our opponent.

Text: ¹⁰ Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil. ¹² For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. ¹³ This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. ¹⁴ Stand, therefore,

with truth like a belt around your waist,
righteousness like armor on your chest,
¹⁵ and your feet sandaled with readiness
for the gospel of peace.

¹⁶ In every situation take the shield of faith,
and with it you will be able to extinguish
all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation,
and the sword of the Spirit,
which is God’s word.

¹⁸ Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. ²⁰ For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough in Him to speak as I should.

Introduction: Now, as our reading suggests this is not athletic imagery, but instead, language that speaks to something that soldiers and athletes have in common—opponents. As such, this passage is useful to us today as we continue our thinking about Becoming Champions for Christ. As Paul sat in a Roman prison, presumably in constant contact with Roman soldiers, perhaps he saw in their uniform a perfect illustration of the Christian life. We must have the armor of God as we stand against a very real, although allusive enemy.

The Description of our Opponent

We need to begin by understanding something about our opponent. A 2009 Barna report revealed these findings about Christianity’s views about Satan. Four out of ten Christians (40%) strongly agreed that Satan “is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.” An additional two out of ten Christians (19%)

said they “agree somewhat” with that perspective. A minority of Christians indicated that they believe Satan is real by disagreeing with the statement: one-quarter (26%) disagreed strongly and about one-tenth (9%) disagreed somewhat. The remaining 8% were not sure what they believe about the existence of Satan.

- Real—I think the first thing that we notice in this passage is something about the nature of our opponent. Let us be sure that the New Testament depicts our enemy as being real. First Peter 5:8 declares about this opponent that he is roaming to and fro across the earth seeking someone to devour. We cannot be indifferent toward this opponent. This real opponent has as his goal to destroy us—to keep us from being the spiritual champions that God would destine us to be. Satan, is not as the Barna report revealed, *the symbol of evil*, he is evil—he is the evil one. If we do not understand this, there is little hope that we will be able to stand against this opponent.
- Spiritual—This passage is also clear that our opponent is a spiritual one. This is tricky, because this means that we cannot see our opponent. But here is the thing—we cannot fight spiritual battles with anything less than spiritual means. That is, we cannot use human weapons in spiritual battles—we must use spiritual weapons—weapons that, as we will see, this passage gives to us.

The Devices of our Opponent

As I began to think about this phrase, I couldn’t help but think about the piece written by Paul Harvey some years ago. In part the piece reads like this: If I were the Devil...

I would delude their minds into thinking that they had come from man's effort, instead of God's blessings;

I would promote an attitude of loving things and using people, instead of the other way around;

I would convince people that character is not an issue when it comes to leadership;

I would make it legal to take the life of unborn babies;

I would take God out of the schools, where even the mention of His name was grounds for a lawsuit;

I would come up with drugs that sedate the mind and target the young, and I would get sports heroes to advertise them;

I would attack then family, the backbone of any nation. I would make divorce acceptable and easy, even fashionable. If the family crumbles, so does the nation;

I would persuade people that the church is irrelevant and out of date, the Bible is for the naive:

I would dull the minds of Christians, and make them believe that prayer is not important, and that faithfulness and obedience are optional;

I GUESS I WOULD LEAVE THINGS PRETTY MUCH THE WAY THEY ARE!

Paul Harvey is not a preacher or a theologian, but I do believe he is on to a few truths here.

Tactically ⇒ **Schemes**—The Greek word is *methodia*. Perhaps you can hear our English word methods in this Greek word. The word is only used one other time in the New Testament, and that was back in Ephesians 4:14 in reference to the deceitful way that false teaching comes into the church. Our enemy has deceitful methods that he is using against us.

Specifically ⇒ The devil's way is a scheming way. But, how does he scheme? There is no end to the list, but the first account of his Satan's scheming way is helpful as we discover it in Genesis 3. The first thing you ought to notice in Genesis 3 is that the serpent is crafty. This personification of Satan in Genesis 3 is consistent with the word "devices" in 2 Corinthians 2:11 and "schemes" here in Ephesians 6:11. Notice 3 Schemes of Satan.

1. Satan causes us to doubt the Word of God.

Notice the way that the serpent begins the conversation with Eve. "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" In Genesis 2:16-17 we read what God said. Satan comes behind that and distorts the word of God and thus creates a doubt for the word of God. Interestingly enough, we see from Eve's response that she even added to God's word for she added "or touch." God, according to 2:16-17 never said this.

That still is the scheme of Satan. Take any issue that we do not like what God's Word says. Our first temptation will be to say, "Well, maybe that's not what God meant." We take away and sometimes even add to God's Word.

This is the place where all sin starts. Here's the way this doubt works. First, we doubt the word of God. When we begin to doubt the word of God, then we begin to question the Bible's accuracy. If we question the accuracy, we replace the truth of the Bible with another view—a view that comes from the world.

Someone has said it this way: "Satan puts a question mark where God put a period."

2. Satan deceives.

The second scheme of the devil is that he deceives. He lies! In the Gospel of John (8:44) Jesus said, "Satan does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him." In this same scripture, Satan is called a "liar and the father of all lies."

Once Satan begins to cause us to doubt the Word of God as accurate, he will begin to fill us with lies.

On October 12, 1998, six men were killed in the predawn hours while sleeping inside the rails of a train track. The incident took place around 3:15 A.M. when a southbound Union Pacific train with 105 cars was about fifty miles north of Harlingen, Texas. The crew was unable to stop the forty-five-mile-per-hour train in time and none of the six men were adequately awakened by the horn. Tragically, this is not an uncommon occurrence among undocumented immigrants and other transients.

There is a mistaken belief that snakes will not cross railroad tracks, therefore, it is believed that one can sleep between the rails and be protected from the snakes. This tragedy is only accentuated by the reality that this is erroneous information. Officials from Union Pacific Railroad have noted that their tracks are littered with snakes that have been cut in half while crossing the rails. The warm rocks under an elevated rail bed actually attract snakes at night.

These six men became victims of a lie, and countless others fall prey to a similar myth about a far more deadly snake, [the Devil]. We can be [fooled] into believing that there are certain havens where Satan won't go, but his deceptive schemes will make sure we are never beyond his deadly desires. The peaceful sleep that he offers is always between the rails of death and destruction.¹

3. Satan promises what he cannot deliver.

The Third scheme of Satan is that he promises what he cannot deliver.

Whatever the destruction of Satan, he works in this way. Consider the example of Jesus' temptation as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 4. He promised Jesus:

8 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

Satan could not deliver on this promise, and neither can Satan deliver on what may be promised today by his schemes.

The Delivery from our Opponent

- **Stand firm and Be Ready.**
- **Strengthen yourself with God's Resources.**

He provides defensive weapons: truth, righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, and our salvation. He provides offensive weapons: the Word of God and prayer.

We don't put the armor on so much as we keep the armor on. Martin Luther spoke about overcoming temptation in a very descriptive way. He said, "When the devil comes knocking on my door and asks, 'Does Martin Luther live here?' I just get as close to Jesus as I can and I find that when I am surrendered to Him that Jesus, Himself, answers the door, saying, 'No, Martin Luther used to live here, but he has

¹ From a sermon on SermonCentral.Com by Dr. Damian Phillips of Mount Olivet Baptist Church, Willisburg, KY.

surrendered control of this residence to Me.” Martin Luther said, “When Satan sees the face of Jesus and sees the nail-prints in His hands, he turns and runs saying, “Oops, I must have the wrong address!”

The Defeat of our Enemy

- **Notice verse 11 and 13.**
- **Hebrews 2:14**
¹⁴ Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through His death He might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the Devil —

The key word here is “destroy.” Stop living like Satan has the upper hand, and start living like the Devil has been destroyed through the death of Jesus Christ.