

Read also Isaiah 11:1-5, 59:17-21

John A. Murray wrote an article for the Wall Street Journal recently which said, “A survey by the Barna Group (released last week) found that only 43% of Americans believe the devil to be a “living entity,” as opposed to a symbol of evil.”¹

Do you believe there is a devil?

I do! But, he is not a power opposite to God. Rather, the devil is a created being; an angel who, by the abuse of his free will became an enemy of God. He is, then, opposite of the angels, like Michael or Gabriel. The devil is a bad angel.

Second question. Do you believe we are in a battle with evil? Certainly, as we commemorate the ten year anniversary of 9/11 we feel we have suffered evil, and we battle against it. In fact, terrorism is an enemy we cannot always see.

The Bible says, the devil is at war – specifically, at war against humans. Peter writes, “Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith . . .” (1 Pet 5:8-9).

It is not good to disbelieve the devil exists. However, it is also an error to be excessively obsessed with the devil, as if he were hiding behind every bush. But, if you sense you are in a battle, what do you do? Ephesians proposes that we have a sense of confidence and security in the midst of bitter combat.

Let’s read it. READ Ephesians 6:10-20.

Did you hear the military images? They are so intense I feel I should put on my uniform. I’m ready to sign up! I feel the urge to drop down and do pushups. How does someone who signs up for the military prepare for battle? I wasn’t sure, so I called a Marine – one right here in this congregation. So I have firsthand information from “the first to fight,” the men who mobilize any ship-to-shore operation in six hours. It is great information!

They employ three strategies:

1. Strategy of tearing down the individual world and teaching you who you are as part of the community of Marines. You gain a new identity. “You can’t cry to mama,” my Marine friend said. Life is no longer lived alone, but the team accomplishes something.
2. Strategy for building you up physically to the best you can be, and training you to march and use weapons.
3. Strategy for combat training. You actually go out camping in the woods and use the skills you have learned. They call it the crucible.

¹John A. Murray, “C. S. Lewis and the Devil,” Wall Street Journal: Opinion, August 5, 2011, A11.

Now if you are not into war, there are other kinds of enemies; perhaps not as life-threatening, but, the way some of you yell at football games, you might think each play is life and death. So in a way, someone on an athletic team is in a battle, with the goal to win.

So how do you essentially fight a battle against other teams to be the victor? You strategize.

Sports teams also use three basic strategies:

1. Strategy for identity. It's no longer about you, or an individual hero, but it is about the team and the legacy of the team.
2. Strategy for building you up physically to your peak performance.
3. Strategy for winning - mental training when the going gets rough.

Ephesians 6 tells us the devil is a strategist. You can't see the devil. We don't fight against an embodied enemy; nevertheless, he is very powerful and he has a team, including evil rulers, authorities, and spirits who work to influence the world for evil and who take aim against our faith with "fiery arrows." Fiery arrows were actually weapons of the day – arrows that were set on fire and when they hit a shield, which was made of wood, the shield would burst into flame.

You can imagine the panic is caused the soldier. Naturally if your shield was hit, you would want to cast it off, making you completely vulnerable.

So that picture is a metaphor for faith-breaking, panic causing events that Satan throws at us.

But the devil is not the only one with a strategy. God has a strategy too, so that we do not end up laying on the ground, faith shattered, and groveling in defeat.

First of all, our identity is not of "people struggling through life alone," but we are God's own children, together; who have access to His power and presence.

Are you feeling His presence this morning? Are you living into His power today?

Now, the good news is, our God has already won! Martin Luther says, "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing. Were not the right man on our side, the man of God's choosing, Lord Sabbaoth – He must win the battle."

God gives us His weapons. Here they are:

1. Truth
2. Righteousness
3. The Peace of the gospel
4. Faith
5. Salvation
6. The Word of God

He tells us a little bit about each of these.

Truth is like a belt – it holds stuff up; frees your legs for action. Isaiah said, "(Our Savior) will wear righteousness like a belt and truth like an undergarment" (11:5).

We have both from our Savior. If there is a question about what is true or what is right, look to Jesus. He will give it to you. Stand on it. Wrap yourself in it. Act on it. It will protect you.

If you go into battle, you must wear shoes. The peace of the gospel covers your feet – that's the good news that wherever you go, you are always safe, even if you should die. "I give you my peace," Jesus said, "not as the world gives." Jesus' peace is the peace that passes all understanding. It is a peace not dependent upon good circumstances, but peace in the midst of the storm.

The next protective armor is the shield of faith.

Faith is a wonderful thing because it gives hope at all times. We often do not see a way; faith is the knowledge that with God nothing is impossible. How many times have we seen no way around here?

Faith says, "There is more than we can see, and God is good."

The last seven years I have studied Scripture a lot, and the conclusion I draw from it is *God is overwhelmingly good*. I may not understand everything, I may not see His every action, but I can say that with absolute confidence – God is good all the time, and you can trust Him.

Faith extinguishes the fiery arrows of Satan that send us into a panic.

Now, the next two we are to receive. First we put on truth, righteousness, and peace. Then we take up faith. Then, God gives us two sheer gifts.

Picture yourself standing there in uniform, grasping your shield. And then Jesus Christ comes over to you with a helmet – the helmet of salvation – protecting you with something He himself has done for you. He lives, and no matter what, you will live as He lives.

Now you are ready for battle. You have been given every defensive piece of equipment necessary to set you into action.

You are standing there. Jesus places an offensive weapon in your hand – a sword. The sword of the Spirit; a two-edged sword.

It's better than a laser, even a magic one like Harry Potter. It's the Word of God, and as you proclaim it, it defeats Satan's delusions of hopelessness, evil, destruction, and lies.

Wield it fully, with everything you've got.

There's one more offensive weapon, and that's prayer. In prayer, ask for God to use the Word boldly in your life; and that you would courageously speak it to defeat Satan's assaults against this world.

Martin Luther writes, “And tho’ the world with devils filled should threaten to undo us; We will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us, and one little Word shall fell him.”

We are given God’s strategy for triumph in an embattled situation.

Do you want to win? Put on the full armor of God.

AMEN