

Know your enemy

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[0 : 00] Well, as we're thinking about this passage from Ephesians 6, verses 10 through 20, I just want to start with a quote from the great Chinese general, Sun Tzu, in his book, The Art of War.

He wrote this, If you know neither yourself nor your enemy, you will succumb in every battle. And think about this.

We need to know our enemies. We do this in sport. Coaches will spend hours and hours looking at footage and film of games to see what opposing players are capable of doing and what opposing coaches will do in this situation or that situation.

We do this in business as well. What is the competition doing? Where are they generating their sales? How are they developing a new product for the market?

Or think about military intelligence. It would be crazy to go to war with someone if you don't know what they're capable of, if you don't know what they're able to do, if you don't know how your enemy fights.

[1 : 13] And yet, so often that is precisely what we do when we think about this ongoing invisible warfare that's going on between Satan and the church of Jesus Christ.

That's why Paul writes these verses here in Ephesians chapter 6. In Acts 19, we get the backstory. Luke records for us how it was that Paul came to Ephesus and planted the church there.

And the city is awash, Luke tells us, with demonic activity. And so Paul writes these words to the Ephesian church because he wants them to know how their enemy fights.

He wants them to know how their enemy fights. And that's our main point this morning is to know your enemy. To know your enemy. This sermon will be a little bit different perhaps than other sermons.

You might have heard on this passage, I won't be going piece of equipment by piece of equipment and sort of analyzing them. I've heard lots of sermons like that.

[2 : 19] I'm sure you have as well. This is going to be a little bit different in that rather than investigating the armor per se. I want us to think about the inverse question. What is it that Satan does that requires these pieces of armor in particular?

What is it that Satan does that requires this kind of armor? So we're going to look at two points this morning. First of all, we're going to examine Satan's schemes against you. Then secondly, we're going to look at Satan's schemes against you all.

You all, if we were in Texas. So first, Satan's schemes against you. You individually. How does Satan try to undermine your faith?

Well, the short answer is, it depends. It really does depend. A Puritan named Thomas Brooks, he wrote an excellent book called Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices.

And this is what he wrote. Satan loves to sail with the wind and to suit men's temptations to their conditions and inclinations. If they be in prosperity, he will tempt them to deny God.

[3 : 28] If they be in adversity, he will tempt them to distrust God. If their knowledge be weak, he will tempt them to have low thoughts of God. If their conscience be tender, he will tempt them to scrupulously examine their hearts.

If their conscience be healthy, he will tempt them to carnal security. If bold-spirited, he will tempt to presumption. If timid, to desperation. If flexible, to inconstancy.

If stiff, to impenitency. It's a little bit, Satan is a little bit like a pro golfer. He has this bag of clubs and he knows the terrain of the human soul, as it were.

And he knows exactly, he's a pro golfer. He knows exactly which club to use in which situation. What will work best to undermine your faith and to undermine your trust in Jesus?

And he's brilliant at picking the best one for any situation. Now, at that point then, thinking about that, thinking about how long he's been doing this. Thousands of years. He's been working at this. [4 : 31] He knows us. How can we stand against him? How do we, in however many years we've been walking in the faith, how can we ever guard against him?

We might as well just give up now. But that's why Paul starts in verse 10. That's why he starts in verse 10 the way he does, by telling us to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. In this one verse, Paul uses three different Greek words to talk about strength or might or power. And he does this to emphasize that the source of this is not ourselves.

It's God. It's the Lord who possesses this overwhelming firepower which we have access to. But it comes from God. It comes from Jesus.

Thomas Brooks again, he says this, Christ our champion has already won the field and will shortly set our feet upon the necks of our spiritual enemies. Satan is a foiled adversary.

[5 : 32] Christ holds him captive and triumphed over him at the cross. Christ has already overcome him and put weapons in your hands so that you may overcome him also.

So the weapons that Paul talks about here in Ephesians 6 are these weapons that we find here. And with that in mind, it seems that all these different schemes of attack that Satan could use to try to undermine us and assault us, they can be boiled down to three basic methods, three basic ways that Satan tries to attack us and attack our faith.

Temptation, accusation, and affliction. Temptation, accusation, and affliction. First, temptation.

Think back to the garden and how Satan tempted and wooed Eve.

What are the first words out of his mouth? Did God really say? Say. He asked an easy question that Eve knew the answer to. Did God say you can't eat from any tree in the garden?

Well, no, no, of course. That's not what he said. He said we could eat from every tree, just not that one. Oh. That's very interesting.

[6 : 44] Why not? Why not that one? And already, by asking the question, he has started sowing seeds of doubt in her mind.

Wait. You mean God's not letting you do something? He's holding out on you? Why is he doing that?

What is he hiding from you, Eve? Adam? What is there that he doesn't want you to have? And that sets the stage then for the serpent's next words, where he says, you will not die, but you will become like God, knowing good and evil.

That's funny, because this is a convenient half-truth. Yes, they would know good and evil, but it's interesting. When he says, you will become like God.

If you go back to Genesis 1, three times in Genesis 1, we are told that Adam and Eve, these first people in the garden, were created in the image and likeness of God.

[7 : 52] Three times. They're already like God. They don't need anything else. But Satan is a salesman. He's a consummate salesman.

He is so good a salesman, he could sell you the shirt off your back and make you think that you're getting a good deal for it. That's what he's doing. You will become like God. He takes our eyes off what we have and being content with what we have and makes us think, there's something else I need.

Something I have to have. Eve, God doesn't want what's best for you. He's saving it for himself. He's keeping you in your place. You deserve that.

Take it for yourself. It belongs to you. Fight for your rights and you'll finally have life. But in fact, that only leads to death. It only leads to death.

And so instead of finding our joy and contentment in God, we rebel and look for it elsewhere.

Friends, how do we resist the smooth words of the devil? How do we resist? Well, I think this is why Paul starts the list of the armor by talking about the belt of truth.

[9 : 02] To stand against the father of lies, we needed to be girded with the truth. We need to know that in Christ, we have everything we need. This is why Paul writes in Romans 8.32, He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

We have everything we need. He has provided, and we have the principal thing. We have Jesus himself, God's own son, that guarantee, the evidence, that God truly does love us and truly does have our best interests at heart.

This is what he wants for us. The second scheme the devil uses is accusation. If we were to turn to Zechariah, in the Old Testament, Zechariah 3, verses 1-5, we would get a glimpse into the courtroom of heaven.

And in this heavenly courtroom stands the high priest Joshua. He stands in the dock and prowling around the courtroom like a prosecuting attorney is Satan.

And Satan, that name literally means accuser. And so he is, Joshua is clothed in filthy garments, representing the sinfulness of God's people. And Satan is hurling a torrent of accusations against him.

[10:19] You are unworthy. You are a faithless and sinful and bespotted high priest. You don't deserve to be here. You don't deserve to be before God.

You don't deserve to represent the holiness of God. You are guilty. Guilty. Guilty. Guilty. And here's the thing. Joshua knows that it's true. Joshua knows it's true.

Some of us this morning perhaps might feel like Joshua. We think back. The words run through our mind again and again.

You're unworthy. You too are faithless. You too are a mess, a wreck. Who do you think you are? Why are you here?

Who says that you have the right to come here and to worship God in his presence? You don't belong here. Perhaps it's regret, so your conscience condemning you from your past.

[11:18] Maybe it's someone in your life perhaps who's that constant belittling and mocking. Maybe an employer. Maybe it's an in-law.

Or perhaps a parent. Someone who's constantly making you feel that nothing you do ever measures up. You had your chance, but you blew it.

How can we stand against the accusations of the devil? Well, what did God do for Joshua? Again, if you look at Zechariah 3, he takes away his filthy garments. And he dresses him in the pure white robes of the high priest, including crowning him with a turban.

And on the front of that turban was a little plaque, golden plaque, that said, Holiness to the Lord. This is who Joshua was.

Even if in his own self, even if in his own efforts, his own actions, he didn't deserve that. But this is what God proclaims about him. You are mine. You are precious to me.

[12:22] You are holy before me. Adapting it to Paul's language, we need that next item in the list of the armor. The breastplate of righteousness. We need to be clothed by the righteousness of our high priest, Jesus.

Only then can we stand before God without shame and without guilt, for there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Martin Luther, the famous reformer, wrote this, When the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this, I admit that I deserve death and hell.

What of it? For I know one who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where he is there I will be also. The third scheme of the devil is affliction. Think about the story of Job. Job in the Old Testament was a prosperous man with great wealth and flocks and herds and many, many children. He had a devout faith in God, but then the story changes.

It takes a turn for the worse. It changes scenes, and suddenly we're caught up into heaven, and we get another glimpse of the heavenly courtroom. And there, we listen in on an encounter between God and Satan.

[13:42] And God says, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth who is blameless and upright? And Satan basically says to God, Even a dog doesn't bite the hand that feeds it.

You take away all these privileges and advantages from Job, he'll curse you. Just watch. Let me try. And so God gives permission to Satan to put Job's life through the shredder.

He loses his wealth. He loses his flocks, his herds. He loses all of his children. He loses everything. Everyone turns on him. Some friends show up, and they basically ask him over and over again, What did you do to deserve this?

Thanks, guys. His wife tells him, Just curse God and die. Get it over with. Stop it. Stop being so righteous, Job. And in the midst of all this discouragement and loss and heartbreak, he has no idea why any of this is happening.

He's just crying out to the sky, God, why is this happening? But there's no answer. It's just silence. And for the next 37 chapters of Job, we get just chapter after chapter after chapter of anxiety, of frustration, of anger, of a sense of gloom and depression and despair.

[15:11] Why is this happening? And at the end, you get to the end of the book, and Job never finds out that Satan is behind all of this. In the same way, friends, some of you might be dealing with affliction this morning.

Maybe not to that extreme, but perhaps you are as well. Maybe you are wrestling with depression or discouragement. Something that just is crushing your soul and is heavy upon you.

Maybe it is, this week, there's been a call from the doctor. Poor diagnosis. Maybe it's even something as simple as, you know, a few nights of no sleep with new children.

You know, it still wears on us and you wonder, oh, this is just one week. Is this going to continue? All right. Yes, it is. But you'll get through it.

It's fine. Been there. So, where do we go? Where do we turn when affliction crashes over us like waves? Well, listen to these words of the Apostle Paul from 2 Corinthians 1, verses 8 and 9.

[16:21] We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

Friend, when affliction saps your strength and makes you feel like death, go to the God who raises the dead. That's where we go. This is how Job, despite his circumstances, could say to his friends in Job 19, I know that my Redeemer lives.

And at the last, he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God. See, this is Job's hope. This is what he's longing for.

And despite all, friends, we have that same hope. No matter what is oppressing us, we have a firm foundation. And this is why that next piece of armor, I think, is this feat shod with the gospel of peace.

[17:30] Because we stand firm knowing that we have a Savior who has drunk the cup of affliction. He knows what you and I experience each and every day.

The worst as well as the best. And because he has willingly suffered in our place. He has been given all authority in heaven and earth. And when he returns, we too will be raised.

And we will see him. We will have new life with him. That gospel of peace is the foundation of our hope in the midst of affliction.

But Satan doesn't just attack us individually. He also attacks us as a group, as a church. And this is why that leads to the second point. We need to know Satan's schemes against y'all, against all of us.

And we don't often think about this corporate aspect when thinking about Ephesians 6. Oftentimes, these are just some good memory verses that you need to stick in your mind for when you're attacked. But it's something corporate for us as well.

[18:30] And it's actually really clear. All the verbs and all the pronouns in Ephesians 6 are plural. It's you all, you all, you all, in the Greek. He says, you all be strong in the Lord.

You all put on the armor of God so that you all can stand against the schemes of the devil. plural. It's all plural language. And so there are two main ways that Satan attacks us corporately, just very quickly.

First, by undermining our unity, and second, by undermining our doctrine. First, undermining our unity. That next piece of armor that Paul mentions there is the shield of faith.

Now, I think that stories like Pilgrim's Progress have sometimes, have to an extent, romanticized, like what the Christian life looks like. You are this sole, single knight off fighting the dragon, the beast, Apollyon, in the valley.

And you are, it's just mano a mano. All right? You are going toe to toe, one to one, with Satan. But that's not actually how people fought in the ancient world.

[19:37] And the shield in particular, I think, highlights this. Because in ancient warfare, armies were made up of these dense groups of men who tried to punch holes in the enemy lines. And because they're so packed together, they were perfect targets for archers, for arrows to then attack them.

The archer's goal was to break up the formation, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. And that's why they needed shields. But a shield won't protect you individually. The shields only really work when there's a bunch of you together, and you lock shields, you put the shields, you link them together side by side to protect you from the arrows that are raining down upon you from above.

And it enabled you to advance practically unharmed. But it only works if you stay together. And that's why I think Paul, over and over and over again, throughout these verses, says, stand firm. It's actually a military command. Stay in line. Stay in line, despite the fact that you have these arrows raining down upon you. Now, if we were to look around at each other, you might see people that you're not fond of.

[20 : 51] Maybe you're fond of everyone here. Maybe you find some people here, every now and then, of course, irritating or perhaps a little stressful. They just don't quite get it.

People back there as well, wherever kids' church is happening. If only we were all on exactly the same page, there are all these threats that tempt us to undermine our faith, our common faith, our unity with one another, and for division to creep in.

Paul says in Ephesians chapter 4, earlier in this book, we share one Lord, one faith, one baptism. And Satan's doing everything he can to break up that unity.

And one way that he does it is through comparison. It works both ways. If you compare yourself to those who seem to be above you, better than you, well, you'll feel ashamed, perhaps, of who you are.

Perhaps you're not as popular, not as well-to-do, not as pious as they are. And so it can lead us to feel jealous. What can we do to cut them down to size, to bring them down to our level?

[22 : 12] But then alternatively, you could think of it the other way. You compare yourself to those who are beneath you, below you. Well, it can lead you to spiritual snobbery as well.

Father, I thank you. I am not like this poor fool over here, this tax collector. And you'll form cliques. within the church. People within the inner ring.

There's everyone else outside. If Satan can tear the church apart, he renders us ineffective and can pick us off one by one. So friends in Christ stand firm, stand united.

And then lastly, Satan tries to undermine our doctrine. In 1 Timothy chapter 4, Paul warns Timothy that some will depart from the faith and give themselves over to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons.

They'll embrace doctrine taught by false teachers, people who are wolves among the sheep. For example, when Bethel and I were teaching in Uganda a number of years ago, we encountered on every billboard in lots of conversations the error of the prosperity gospel, health and wealth gospel.

[23 : 26] God wants you to be rich, God wants you to be famous, God wants you to have everything you want. And he's promised all these blessings in scripture for you. It's twisting and perverting of scripture. So I actually had a student, I was walking with him one day on the campus where I was teaching, and he said to me, my pastor has his own private jet.

Isn't that wonderful? And after just sort of staring dumbfounded at him for a moment, he's like, no, actually that's not good. He's a false teacher.

He's a wolf taking the money of the sheep. And even here in Scotland, last summer, I was away preaching somewhere else, and I had a weird encounter with someone at a prayer meeting who was a devotee of the faith healing movement.

And he was talking about all these dramatic experiences, spiritual experiences that he had seen and taken part of, of people healed, even raised from the dead. And to sort of redirect the conversation, I asked him about his conversion.

How were you converted? He just brushed it aside. It wasn't dramatic at all. What? God raised you to new life.

[24 : 49] He took you from death to life. That's the most dramatic, amazing thing ever. But this is what false doctrine does. It displaces what's primary and what's central and replaces it with something that's aberrant, something that's twisted, something that seeks to draw attention away from Jesus and what he has done for us.

And so friends, we have to be careful, we have to be ready, and this is why I think Paul then again directs our attention to the sword of the spirit. This is our weapon, the only weapon that we have.

It's the word of God. It's our foundation, it's what we root ourselves in and upon. It's the standard by which we determine truth from error, truth from the lie.

This is how we tell the difference between the voice of our Savior, all throughout the book of Revelation, he's always speaking with a sharp double-edged sword, the voice of our Savior, as well as the voice, the siren song really, of the serpent.

But despite all these wonderful weapons with which we fight against the devil and his snares, it's worth returning to the point I made at the start. We conquer only in and through Christ our champion.

[26 : 02] He is the true champion, not us. It's a point that's often overlooked, but properly speaking, this is not your armor. This is his. In Isaiah 59, verses 16 and 17, it says this, He saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no one to intercede.

Then his own arm brought him salvation and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head.

He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. It's talking about God arming himself for battle to rescue and win back his long-lost people.

Those who were caught and enslaved in sin and God is amazed that there is no one else and so he does it. And we see that in Jesus, in the flesh.

God come into our world to seek and to save the lost. Calvin says, such is our weakness and such is the power of his, Satan's, fury.

[27 : 13] How could we even stand in the slightest against his manifold and continuous attacks unless we relied upon the victory of our leader? Friends, Jesus has won the victory. And so with him and in him, as Romans 16, 20 says, the God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet.

Let's pray. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you for the victory that's been won for us in Jesus. We thank you for him, that he is our conqueror, that he has freed us from the power of the devil, and that he, in him, we are sustained, even under immense affliction, led through in the midst of temptation.

He is the one who supports us, who secures us. I pray that you would help us to flee to him. I pray, Father, that you would gird us up, and that we would seek faithfully to abide in Jesus, our Savior, our King, arming ourselves with his armor, clothing ourselves in his righteousness, testing all things by the standard of your word, that we may be able to stand firm.

We pray for unity, we pray for peace, we pray for your grace. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.