

Be On The Alert!

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“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

There is a lot we do not understand about Satan. What is his origin? What motivates him to tempt? How does he work, practically and specifically? Based on the verse above, the first thing we can know about him is that he is an “*adversary*”, an enemy. Never confuse that truth! Only try to know or understand Satan in the sense of trying to understand an enemy in battle. Dabbling in his ways or showing too much curiosity about the devil is a sign that your warning siren is not working properly – you are not seeing him for who he really is.

Second, the apostle acknowledges that Satan “*prowls about*”, as in, he has movement and presence. He has direction, goals (though, certainly not noble). He disguises himself (2 Corinthians 11:14) at times, but promotes sin through very obvious means at other times, such as false doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1), sexual temptation, or unwarranted anger (Ephesians 4:26-27). The apostle John asserts that it is not hard to see the difference between a child of God and a child of the devil; they are “*obvious*,” he says, “*for anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother*” (1 John 3:10).

Fortunately, we are not left in the dark about how to resist him. “*But resist the devil, firm in your faith*” (1 Peter 5:9) is what Peter recommends after his haunting description of Satan in the previous verse. The very fact that God asks us to “*resist*” means that He believes we are capable of it – *but not alone!* To conquer the devil I must accept that my many failures are evidence enough of my personal inadequacy in fighting him off. Rather, I should lean more heavily on God if I want to conquer the enemy. “*Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners...*” (James 4:7ff). In this lesson, I want to focus on the personal struggle that we have with Satan. How do we go from theory to practice in resisting him?

Seeking Someone

It is easy to read this phrase out of Peter’s epistle and apply it somewhat impersonally. We might view the devil as a fairly indiscriminate predator, or a vague threat – we acknowledge that Satan is hunting tonight, but hope the odds are in our favor that he is not hunting “*me*”. Yet the Christian needs to be reminded that anybody/everybody is on the menu for tonight – including me! Interestingly, the first epistle that Peter wrote was not written to unbelievers, but to Christians (1 Peter 1:1-3). I think we dismiss the threat of Satan a bit because we think he is preoccupied interacting with a lost world. The “*whole world lies in the powers of the evil one*” (1 John 5:19), after all. Like any good hunter, though, the devil is not worried about the prey that is already in the bag – the souls he has already deceived. He is moving on to new targets, fresh blood. He does not need to tempt or trip-up unbelievers and sinners – it is the unsuspecting Christian that is his primary quarry.

To Devour

Satan means to devour us, to swallow up and utterly destroy. Notice that he is not looking for allies or assistants. There is no compromising with him or seeking a better deal. No, it is your annihilation that the devil seeks. But this can come in many forms, as the parable of the sower teaches (Matthew 13:18ff) – some are devoured through cares and worries of the world, others because of a lack of meaningful understanding or superficiality, and others are devoured simply because truth never sank in. Many Christians give up because of discouragement over other people's sin, as well. They become bitter when others fall away, or because of repeated rejections in personal evangelism. Whatever the case, be on guard against the one who means us harm and actively seek after God. This is, in fact, the prescription given in James 4:7-10.