

STUDY 14

Resist the Devil: The Present Battle for the Kingdom

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This study is to show that the church is in a battle by which the Enemy and his fellow foul fiends intend to thwart the purposes of God. There has been a battle for Eden from the beginning. The battle is for this creature Satan to have equality with God, and even supremacy over him and his world of heavenly and earthly creatures. He seeks to have mankind and angelic beings under his control as slaves of his will. The evil one will do anything in his power to prevent people from coming to know the Son of God and do his utmost, using any means, to destroy the church of God or, at the least, to prevent those who belong to Christ and his church from coming to full maturity in him.

KNOWING THE ENEMY AND HIS DECEITFUL AND VICIOUS STRATEGIES AGAINST CHRIST'S CHURCH

We are urged to know his designs so as not to be outwitted (2 Cor. 2:11):¹

For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).

This is a key verse for understanding the present battle for the kingdom. We may be deceived into thinking that our battle is with people as such. If this is the case then our strategy could be to set up stratagems to fight them with their own system of psychology, politics and cleverness. We certainly are often confronted by wicked people, but the battle is with the powers which deceive and enslave them. The battle is with the vast unseen forces and powers which are headed up by the ruler of the whole world system (Rom. 8:38; 16:19–20; 1 Cor. 2:8; 2 Cor. 2:11; 4:4; 11:13–15; Eph. 2:2; 3:10; Col. 1:13; James 4:7; 1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:10). This battle, or clash, is constant, unremitting and relentlessly changing its style and strategy.²

The enmity against Christ and his church is led by Satan, who is called the adversary (1 Pet. 5:8). Isaiah 14:12–14, Ezekiel 28:11–19, and Revelation 12:7–17

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version.

² Deane Meatheringham, study 7, 'The Clash of the Kingdoms', NCTM Pastors' School 1993, *The Church and the Kingdom of God* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1993), p. 28.

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indicate Satan's fall from heaven as one of God's creatures. His attempt was to remove God and be god, or a god. The battle is a civil war in God's kingdom. The diametrical opposition between God and Satan is clearly stated in the words of the risen Jesus to Paul in Acts 26:17–18:

I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

The church's earthly battle is not in concepts or philosophies, nor even theology, *per se*. It is engaged in a cosmic battle with personal beings, the chief one being Satan. He is a murderer and a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44; Acts 5:3). His nature is falsehood, therefore his chief enemy is truth and so he opposes God's word (Gen. 3:1–5). He casts doubt on God's goodness and destroys the obedience of faith (Gen. 3:1–5). He hinders the ministry of the gospel (1 Thess. 2:18) and blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4). When unsuccessful, he distorts and/or prevents effective preaching of the message (Acts 13:8–10). He uses the fear of death to hold men and women in bondage (Heb. 2:15). He inspires betrayal (John 13:2) and is a schemer against God's people (2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11). He is called the deceiver of the whole world (Rev. 12:9) and to that end often disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). He leads the whole world astray (Rev. 12:9). He is all the more dangerous when he uses deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ, ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:12–15), who no doubt misuse Scripture (Matt. 4:6). He inspires lawlessness and works counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and every sort of wicked deception for those who are perishing (2 Thess. 2:9–10). He traps and holds people captive to his will (2 Tim. 2:26). John aptly calls him the evil one and tells us that the whole world lies under his power (1 John 5:19) and offers exotic, occult alternatives (Rev. 2:19–24). In the church he attacks the faith of believers (2 Cor. 11:3) and causes dissention over doctrine, causing splits (Rom. 16:17–20). Further he uses sexual allurements (1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Tim. 5:15), unresolved anger (2 Cor. 2:10–11; Eph. 4:26–27) and pride (1 Tim. 3:6) to destroy believers. He brings persecution (1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 2:9–10), sickness (Job 1:11; 2:5; Luke 13:16) and suggests ways that don't involve suffering (Matt. 4:1–11).

Our battle is with a fearful and formidable foe, but . . .

THE CHURCH IS SAFE IN GOD'S HANDS

From the beginning there has been a cosmic battle and we are aware of the clash of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. The evil one may have thought he had won the battle in the Garden, but soon after the expulsion from Eden there was a people of God who called on God's name (Gen. 4:26). God still reigned. He raised up people like Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. When the people of God were at their most vulnerable in Egypt, the evil one tried, through ethnic cleansing, to wipe them out. But God remembered his covenant with Abraham (Exod. 2:24) and saved his people and raised up Moses who led God's people to their promised land. But the evil one had not given up, and just before the border crossing into Canaan he tried to prevent Israel from entering the promised land and so ruin once and for all God's plan for salvation for all mankind. The devil's plan was to

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annihilate Israel before they entered Canaan. He used Balak, the king of Moab. He in turn summoned Balaam, a well-known pagan seer, to use his supernatural evil powers not just to thwart Israel but to curse it into oblivion. On the surface it appears to have been a political battle between two nations, between Balak and Moses. In reality it was a cosmic battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the evil one, between God and Satan. Israel was protected and safe in Yahweh's hands. Even Balaam found out that:

The LORD their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them . . . there is no sorcery against Jacob, no divination against Israel. It will now be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'See what God has done!' (Num. 23:21b, 23, NIV).

Later Moses told God's people:

. . . the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you (Deut. 23:5).

Of utmost importance is that we need to know we are dealing with a defeated foe and therefore not fear him. The Book of the Revelation tells us that God 'is' (1:8) and Satan 'is not' (17:11). John writes that the Son of God was revealed for the purpose of destroying the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). D-Day has happened in the Cross-Resurrection events. Jesus is Lord, as all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (Matt. 28:18). V-Day is around the corner until all his enemies are under his feet (1 Cor. 15:24-28). John further writes:

We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

We need to affirm that we are protected by God himself and that ultimately the evil one does not lay hold of us. He cannot thwart God's purpose for God's creation and his church. John tells us that:

. . . the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

Christ's protection is on the basis of the devil's inability to find anything to accuse Jesus of. Therefore the devil has no power over him (John 14:30), and neither over us as we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1). So the reality is that we are very safe in Christ's hands as, 'no one will snatch them out of my hand' (John 10:28). We are protected by the Father himself (John 17:12, 15). In contrast, the rebellious world lies in the devil's evil arms.

Does that mean we can sit back and relax? No way! But there is one more thing we need to know when we are in the battle and that is . . .

THAT THE BATTLE IS PRIMARILY THE LORD'S

There are some outstanding examples of that in the Old Testament. When Judah was about to be invaded, King Jehoshaphat stood before all of God's people and prayed:

We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you (2 Chron. 20:12b).

Then the word of the Lord came to them:

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Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's . . . This battle is not for you to fight; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the LORD on your behalf (2 Chron. 20:15b–17; cf. Deut. 20:1–4).

When King Hezekiah was confronted with the greatest military power of his day, he was told:

Be strong and of good courage . . . for there is one greater with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles (2 Chron. 32:7–8).

In the New Testament we have the strong sayings of Jesus that the gates of hell will not prove stronger than the church (Matt. 16:18) and ‘take courage; I have conquered the world!’ (John 16:33). This means that the church is on the offensive! How? By means of Christ in his church, leading it into battle by the power of the Spirit and his sword, which is the Word of God. John writes:

I am writing to you, young people, because you have conquered the evil one (1 John 2:13),

and:

Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

So what weapons do we use in our . . .

CONSTANT BATTLE FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

The battle is primarily against the King of the kingdom of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. From the moment Jesus was declared to be the beloved Son at his baptism, Satan has raged against him. As the people of God, we are in Christ, and because of our union with him and Satan's inability to defeat Christ, he makes war with us. He seeks to ‘get at’ the Father through the children, and so it has been from the beginning. He knows that he has been defeated and has only limited time to continue his attacks on the church and persons within it.

Revelation 12 and 13 paint a scenario of a war to the death on Christ and his people by the counterfeit unholy trinity of the dragon and his two beasts. But, more importantly, these chapters tell us that in this cosmic battle God is in total control. The question ‘who can fight against it?’ is answered very clearly. Christ is victorious:

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah (Rev. 12:10).

The Lamb's own are also victorious:

But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death (Rev. 12:11).

The heavens are then urged to rejoice and all those who dwell there!

It is *in Christ* that we wrestle—not on our own, out of our resources (Eph. 6:10; Phil. 4:13; John 15:1ff.). As the enemy is beyond our natural power, it is the

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strengthening which comes from our reigning Messiah that enables us to be defended and to join the offensive. We are to ‘be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power’, that is, to stand and live in God himself (Eph. 6:10). It is Christ who has won the battle. He has tied up the strong man (Mark 3:27). He subdues his enemies and enables us to press through the defeated powers of evil (1 Cor. 15:57; Rev. 19:11–16). He did not win the battle as the Lion of Judah but as the Lamb of God. We who are in the Lamb of God are sent like lambs into the midst of wolves (Matt. 10:16). Like Jesus, we will not wage war according to human standards; our weapons of warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds (2 Cor. 10:3–5). God has given spiritual gifts, and these are faith, love, hope, salvation, truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, the sword of the Spirit, prayer, ‘the blood of the Lamb’, ‘the word of their testimony’, and ‘they did not cling to life even in the face of death’ (1 Thess. 5:8; Eph. 6:10–18; Rev. 12:11). The church is in the battle, and must use these gifts! Note this collection of weak gifts, according to the world. There are no heroics here, but the exercise of the gifts we all can use.³ King Jehoshaphat was told to ‘stand still, and see the victory of the LORD on your behalf’. The weapons he and Judah used were: to seek help from the Lord, fasting, praise and worship, faith, earnest prayer, the word of God, admission of weakness (‘but our eyes are on you’), and the weak weapon of singing—not often mentioned in spiritual warfare. God had said the battle was his to fight, so what better way for Judah to meet the enemy than with this song of victory: ‘Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever’ (2 Chron. 20:21). This story illustrates spectacularly that when we are weak we are strong (2 Cor. 12:10). God’s strength is made perfect in weakness; his grace is sufficient for us. The story also shows the use of spiritual songs as an effective weapon against the archenemy Satan. In Acts 16 Paul and Silas had been savagely flogged and put into prison. Then about midnight they were praying and singing hymns to God while the prisoners were listening. God’s response: an earthquake and the conversion of many! After singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb in Revelation 15, all heaven breaks loose! The true Son of God shall come singing his songs and the true sons and daughters of God are singing with him. Luther said, ‘We know that to the devil music is distasteful and insufferable’. Calvin declared that: ‘We know by experience that singing has great force and vigour to move and inflame the hearts of men to invoke and praise God with a more vehement and ardent zeal’.⁴

Peter writes that our adversary is like a roaring lion who prowls around, looking for someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Then he goes on to say . . .

RESIST HIM, STEADFAST IN YOUR FAITH (1 PET. 5:9a)

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you (1 Pet. 5:6–10).

³ I am indebted to Geoffrey Bingham and his unpublished notes, ‘The Church and the Victory of Satan’ (2000) for the material in this section.

⁴ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, Broadman Pr., Nashville, 1988, p. 181.

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James writes:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you (James 4:7–8).

To resist the evil one is to live constantly in humility and dependency. ‘God never makes us so strong that we no longer need him. Never.’⁵ Submission to God is the defeat of Satan. The person who is humble, who is not anxious about many things, will be alert to the true struggle, that is, the battle against evil. Thus it is no time for carelessness. Our adversary is a slanderer and accuser. We must not give in to the excruciating pain of his roaring (accusations). We must draw near to God and by doing that, God will draw near to us. We can therefore resist Satan when he comes to us with his growl of hatred and rage. He does this relentlessly, day and night. But his bellowing is just that: bellowing. When we stand steadfast in our faith he cannot devour us. The only way to defeat Satan and the world is by our faith (1 John 5:4). The picture is of standing and facing him—not running away! Our faith may seem helpless against this fearful enemy, but:

We tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.⁶

James writes that the devil will flee (frightened) at our faith. This standing firm in the faith may even entail martyrdom.⁷

We are able to stand because we believe with all our hearts in the unchanging faithfulness of God’s covenant love to us. We stand not because of our own efforts but God’s great and wonderful action in Christ. We really believe that Christ has destroyed Satan’s power by taking our sin into himself and bearing it in his own body on the tree (Heb. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:24). The principalities and powers have likewise been disarmed at the cross (Col. 2:13–15). Christ then, today and every day, declares us to be forgiven and righteous. There is now no condemnation for us who are in Christ (Rom 8:1). We are a purified people who belong to him (Titus 2:14). If we do sin, ‘we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world’ (1 John 2:1–2). In facing the enemy, our focus must ever be on Christ and his finished work in the Cross and Resurrection and not on the defeated foe.

Lions we recognise, roaring lions we can hear from afar, but the evil one is often harder to recognise when he comes to us as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14) and is far more dangerous. He is such an expert in deception and we can be so easily deceived. More often than not we are facing this ‘deceiver of the whole world’ (Rev. 12:9). He comes with exciting and attractive schemes. The world is so powerful in its ability to seduce and deceive, so clever in fact that sometimes we don’t even realise that we have lost our love for the Father and our delight in his eternal purposes. John in his

⁵ J. Maxwell, quoted by Duane L. Christensen in *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, 2nd edn, WBC, vol. 6A (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 2001), p. 440.

⁶ Martin Luther’s hymn, ‘A Mighty Fortress is our God’. Hymn no. 1 (v. 3) in the New Creation Hymn Book.

⁷ I recommend reading Geoffrey Bingham’s recently republished commentary, *The First Epistle of Peter* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2005).

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second letter tells us to be on guard and keep on abiding in the teaching of Christ. He warns against deceivers who come with a gospel that goes beyond Christ's teaching. These false teachers no doubt claimed that they were more advanced than the ordinary believers (2 John 1:7–8).

Satan loves it when we have turned the things of Christ into clichés or an ideology and then march along with it, having detached it from Christ himself.⁸

God shows us his kingdom centered on his Son. We must resist turning that into an empire centered on an ideology. If we don't, we have been deceived by the evil one. We have separated the kingdom from the King and forged ahead to build a territorial dominion.

God gives us his Spirit to indwell us. We must resist turning him into the external power available on call. If we don't, we have been deceived because we have separated the Spirit from the Father and the Son.

God has established a covenant with us. We must resist turning that into a contract. If we don't, we have been deceived by the world. We have separated the covenant from God and think that the contractual relationship will put us in control.

God sent Christ to restore our fractured relationships. We must resist turning that into a legal entity. If we don't, we live in deception as we have separated the relational from the Father and put ourselves under the bondage of a legal entity.

God has given us a church. We must resist turning that into an institution. If not, we have already been deceived as we have separated the church from God and put ourselves in charge of the institution.

God gives us a ministry. The danger is that we may turn that into a methodology. We must resist that. If not, we live the lie as we have separated the ministry from the Father and centered it on our methodology, believing that it will give us the assured result.

God moves in mysterious ways. We are not content with that but must resist wanting to rationalise all that he has been doing in terms that fit our temporal framework. If not, we have already been deceived. We have separated the ways of God from God himself and have been content with rationalism.

God created us in his own image. At all cost we must resist thinking that we can be like him, as we will then try to create a god in our own image. This is the oldest of all deceptions.

We must resist playing the numbers game or making the gospel, the Bible and the commandments 'user friendly'. We must be on guard not to follow yet another new trend which guarantees church growth. If we do not, we have already been seduced into the world's system of power and success. We cannot plant Jesus into our power base as if he will enhance what we have.

The best and only way to resist and overcome Satan's deceptions and seductions is to love God and to live the life of continuous and positive obedience. Part of this obedience is to proclaim the glorious gospel of the kingdom of God, of victory, of liberation, and of love.⁹

⁸ Much of the following material is inspired by Siew Kiong Tham's unpublished notes, 'The Battle in the Book of Revelation: The Church in Its Action', NCTM Summer School 1999. A cassette tape of the study is available from NCTM.

⁹ Geoffrey Bingham, *The Christian Walk and Warfare—Book One* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1981). Can also be downloaded from the website: <http://www.newcreation.org.au/studies/pdf/C0022_ChristianWarfare_1.pdf>.