

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

The Prowler

1 Peter 1:5:8-9 (709)

1 Peter 5:8-9 ⁸ *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* ⁹ *But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.*

Upon a review of my 709 sermons at APC one would discover that spiritual warfare is a subject to which I have not devoted much attention. Today, however, this spiritual conflict is certainly before us. Peter's focus is on the enemy of souls - the devil. Through Peter the Holy Spirit is warning us of the devil's intentions relative to believers and instructing us as to the divinely prescribed strategy for dealing with him. This leads to the thesis for this sermon: **Watchfulness and faith enable the believer to resist the devil.** Indeed, verse 8 begins with a call to watchfulness.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. *Be sober* is translated by one commentator "pay attention" (Michaels, p. 297). In other words, be clear-headed. Shake off mental confusion and dullness. Peter used this word back in **4:7** in relation to prayer. *Be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.* The second word, *be*

alert, has been translated “wake up” (Michaels, p. 297). In other words, shake off your spiritual lethargy. So God’s word to us is “Pay attention!” “Wake up!”

These two words are used together in **1 Thessalonians 5:6**. ⁶ *so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be **alert and sober**.* ⁷ *For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.* Paul contrasts this spiritual sobriety and alertness with sleeping and drunkenness.

When we drive to Tennessee we normally leave between 5:00 and 5:30 AM. By the time we get to Mt. Pleasant I usually begin to feel a little drowsy. My eyelids begin to get very heavy. I’ll take out the damp washcloth I put in a Ziploc bag and wipe my face to wake me up. *Let us not sleep.* I was in Venice, Italy on my 21st birthday. To celebrate two of my friends, Terry Hodge and Bobby Giles, took me down to a little corner café and bought me two tall glasses of beer. You need to know that I had never tasted more than a single swallow of beer before. At their urging I forced the stuff down. I’m not sure what happened after that. I remember sitting in the hotel lobby talking but don’t have a clue as to what I was saying. The next thing I remember was waking up in my bed. I was drowsy. My reaction time was slowed. My senses were dulled. I was lethargic. I was possessed with a measure of incoherence.

As Christians we are to have our eyes and ears wide open. Ours is to be a heightened awareness of what’s going on within us and around us. Our faculties are to be concentrated upon spiritual realities and upon the task at hand. We are to be spiritually sober and alert. With these two words the Spirit of God issues His call to watchfulness. Watchfulness is not advisable only occasionally. Rather, we are called to a permanent state of watchfulness. Now, why is such a

condition necessary: because there is mortal danger out there. Lurking danger demands extreme caution and watchfulness.

I was discussing this verse with Bob Gamblin this past week and he told me this story. Before landing assault troops on a beach the Marines send in a smaller party of six frogmen to do reconnaissance. Bob and another Marine were being trained as scout swimmers to go in ahead of even that team and check the beach. He and his buddy were dropped a mile off shore. They silently swam in. Once on the beach one went a half mile in one direction and the other a half mile in the opposite direction looking for danger. One time upon Bob's return to the ship during a de-briefing a crusty old sergeant asked him, "Do you think you fully scanned your area?" Bob replied, "I checked for every danger." There was a pause. The sergeant continued, "At one point when you dropped to your knees in the sand and looked around I was less than five yards away from you and could have cut your throat in six seconds." Bob was looking for danger but didn't see it. Lurking danger demands extreme caution and watchfulness.

Dear Christian, extreme watchfulness is required of us because we too have an enemy lurking in the darkness. Peter identifies him as *your adversary, the devil*. We know this particular being as Satan; that "high angelic creature who before the creation of the human race, rebelled against the Creator and became the chief [opponent] of God and man" (Elwell, p. 972).

Peter uses two separate terms to identify Satan. He calls him *your adversary*. In its narrow sense *adversary* refers to an opponent in a court of law. Jesus used the term in **Matthew 5:25**: "*Make friends quickly with your opponent at law ... in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge.*" I think it may be better here

to understand *adversary* in the more general sense of enemy. The second term is *devil*. The Greek word *devil* translates the Hebrew word *satan*. It refers to a personal, spiritual, and evil being; the accuser of Christians.

Peter moves on to describe the aim of the devil. His intention is not to simply annoy us. His goal is not to simply make life miserable. He is no mere instigator of personal and corporate mayhem. He is no mere troublemaker. His purpose is not just to harass the saints. Beloved, the devil seeks our destruction. In my reading on the Second World War I have become familiar with the term “total war.” In total war the options are survival or annihilation. In total war no measure to survive is too extreme; no measure to destroy the enemy is too brutal. Make no mistake. The devil’s aim is your spiritual annihilation. If there was a stronger word I assure you I would use it.

This destructive aim is made alive and vivid by the Spirit of God as Peter portrays the devil as a *roaring lion prowling about seeking someone to devour*. You know, I just haven’t seen many lions in my life. My limited knowledge of lions has come from visits to the zoo, National Geographic magazines, and wildlife specials on TV. That’s about it. I have to admit to a certain fascination at seeing the lions stalking their prey, pursuing the prey, making the kill, and then eating the victim. The original readers of this letter, however, knew about lions in an “up close and personal” way. Listen to Dr. Clowney. “Some who received Peter’s letter would have a stronger horror. They had seen human blood dripping from the chops of lions in the gory spectacles of a Roman amphitheatre” (1 Peter, p. 213).

Listen to the words of Ignatius as he anticipated his death in the Roman Coliseum: 'Let me be given to the wild beasts, for through them I can attain unto God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread ... Come fire and cross and grapplings with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, hacking of limbs, crushing of my whole body, come cruel tortures of the devil to assail me. Only be it mine to attain unto Jesus Christ' " (Ignatius to the *Romans*, 4-5; AF, p. 77, as quoted by Clowney, p. 213).

"The goal of the [lion's] hunt is to find someone to devour. The term *devour* is graphic, meaning "to drink down." The picture is one of a beast swallowing its prey in a gulp ... The graphic description pictures the annihilation of the believer that the devil wishes to achieve" (Davids, p. 191). OK, that's verse 8.

Remember in verses 5-7 Peter urged us to humility before God and to submission to elders and everyone else in the church. Here in verses 8-9 his point is that such careful obedience finds great opposition by the devil. I want to express my debt to and appreciation for the work of Thomas Manton in his old commentary on the Book of James as we explore how the devil actually does his work.

Peter says he *prowls about*. Certainly this suggests stealth, cunning, silence, and deception. The Scripture teaches that God is at work in us. **Philippians 2:13** says, *for it is God who is at work in you*. The Scripture also teaches that Satan is at work. **Ephesians 2:2** speaks of *the prince of the power of the air ... that is now working in the sons of disobedience*. Same word. What's the difference between how the Spirit works in us and how the devil works?

The Spirit's work is creative. Jesus said, "*It is the Spirit who gives life.*" The Spirit of God sovereignly creates in us a new heart. By His sweet and strong power the Spirit of God compels the soul of the elect sinner to assent to and embrace the truth of the gospel. God, the Holy Spirit, needs nothing (like a prior disposition) in man to work with. This is not so with the devil. Unlike the Holy Spirit, Satan cannot create. Satan cannot compel. He takes advantage of our own wickedness, our own corruption, our own sinful desires, inclinations, and lusts to work his purposes in us. He exercises a strong operation upon our wills and understandings *by our own consent*.

The devil has had millennia to observe fallen men. He has observed our prayers, our conversation, and our passions. He has studied our habits, our inclinations, our tendencies, and our preferences. He has had millennia to gain experience in his deceptive craft. Like a good fisherman knows the proper bait to use so the devil baits us with that which he knows we will go after.

And this accounts for the divine call to be sober and alert. Have you ever received a phone call from a telemarketer asking you to buy something or to donate something? That call is a solicitation. The devil solicits. He devises *schemes* to entice us to sin (**Eph. 6:11**). He lures people to sin. He sets *snares* for us (**2 Tim. 2:26**). He works by making sinful suggestions. He works by deceit. He disguises sin to look harmless, indeed, beneficial and enjoyable. He works by stirring up sensual desires. He brings just the right person, at just the right time, in just the right attire to inflame sinful lusts. He stirs up anger and revenge. He presents objects before us that he knows will ensnare our hearts and misdirect our affections. He sets falsehood before us to confuse our understanding.

What are we to do about these schemes of the enemy? What is our sacred duty? What is our strategy to be? The instruction of God is to *resist the devil*. Paul says so in **Ephesians 6:13**. *Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you maybe able to resist in the evil day*. James says so in **James 4:7**. *Resist the devil*. Peter says so here in **verse 9**. *But resist him*. Our strategy is resistance. To resist is to withstand the force or effect of something or someone. Like a body resists the invasion of disease, like a well-built house resists the winds of a hurricane we are to set ourselves against the devil. We are to take a personal stance against him. Beloved, the commands of Scripture governing human relations do not apply here. This is spiritual warfare. No peace is to be made with the devil. No quarter is to be given him. Neither kindness nor consideration is to be shown him. We are called to *resist him*.

What are the features of this strategy of resistance? Remember the devil has no power to enforce but he has only the cunning to ensnare. First, we resist by maintaining watchfulness. According to Luther this means to “always take pleasure in God’s Word, remember it, meditate upon it and diligently cling to it, thank God for it, and pray that you may understand it better and lay hold on it more firmly” (*1 Peter*, p. 221). Second, we are not to give him any opportunity to work his craft. **Ephesians 4:27** says, *and do not give the devil an opportunity*. For example, by not dealing with our anger immediately and decisively we give the devil an opening to wreck spiritual havoc in our lives. Third, we check the devil with a simple refusal to cooperate. After our Lord we say, “*Get behind me Satan*” (**Matt. 16:23**). Fourth, we properly equip ourselves for spiritual combat.

Ephesians 6:11 and **13** say, *Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil ... take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.*

This armor includes a certainty as to the *truth* of God's word (**Eph. 6:14**), the assurance of the *righteousness* of Christ imputed to us (**6:14**), the peace of the *gospel* (**6:15**), the faithfulness of God to complete his work of *salvation* in us (**6:17**), our familiarity with and use of the *word of God* (**6:17**), and our diligent attention to believing *prayer* (**6:18**).

Peter focuses upon one piece of this armor in verse 9. *But resist him, firm in your faith.* Faith is called our *shield* that protects us from the fiery darts of the devil. Faith is our hearty reliance upon the promises of God in Christ – standing upon what God has said in His Word about the freeness of grace, the sinfulness of sin, the justice and love of God, the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, imputed righteousness, and about God's preserving power. In short, standing upon the gospel of the grace of God in Christ. Then Satan cannot gain the advantage. He is compelled to retire at least for a time.

The devil flees as we are firm in faith (**James 4:7**). We do this not only by holding Biblical doctrines firmly but also by remaining firm in one's trust in God. The word "firm" originally applied to physical firmness or hardness, such as a *firm foundation* (**2 Tim. 2:19**). Here, as in Acts 16:5, the term is applied to character - becoming firm in our commitment to Christ. **Acts 16:5** says, *So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.* The same idea is expressed in different words in **Colossians 1:23**, *continue in the faith firmly*

established and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, or
Colossians 2:5, *rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.*

One thing that will make our commitment firmer is the awareness that we are not struggling alone. It is not just *me* who is suffering or even just *us* but our brotherhood throughout the world. Peter stresses this fellowship of suffering in two ways. First, by using the collective *brotherhood* instead of the more individual term *brothers*. Second Peter stresses this fellowship of suffering by adding *throughout the world*. He has in mind the world in its physical and global sense (adapted from Davids, pp. 192-193).

“Peter’s point is that we are aware that the church throughout the world experiences the same type of suffering; that the type of rejection and abuse we may know is similar to that suffered by other Christians. Indeed, others in the world today are suffering far more than any of us can even imagine. Like soldiers whose morale is strengthened by knowing that the whole army is engaged in the same battle-hardships they are in, we should be strengthened to resist the devil and not to give in to persecution by the knowledge that we are not alone” (Davids, p. 194). The end of our faith and resolve is given in **Revelation 12:9-11**: *They have conquered [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.*

Benediction (2 Corinthians 1:3-5, 13:14)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

⁵ *For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is*

*abundant through Christ ... ¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.*

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Peter's focus is on the enemy of souls - the devil.

Through Peter the Holy Spirit is warning us of the devil's _____
relative to believers and instructing us as to the divinely prescribed
_____ for dealing with him.

The Big Idea:

_____ and faith enable the believer to _____ the devil.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert (see I Thessalonians 5:6)

God's word to us is " _____!" " _____!"

Watchfulness is not advisable only occasionally.

Rather, we are called to a permanent _____ of alertness.

your adversary, the devil

His identity

His aim

The devil seeks our _____.

The devil's aim is your spiritual _____.

*prowls about like a roaring lion,
seeking someone to devour*

What's the difference between how the Spirit works in us and
how the devil works?

The Spirit's work is _____. The Spirit of God sovereignly created in us a
new heart (Ez. 36:26). God, the Holy Spirit, needs nothing in man to work with.

Unlike the Holy Spirit, Satan cannot create. He takes advantage of our own
_____, our own corruption, our own sinful _____
inclinations, and lusts to work his purposes in us.

What are we to do about these schemes of the enemy? What is our sacred duty?
What is our strategy to be?

But resist him

Our strategy is _____.

What are the features of this strategy of resistance?

We resist by maintaining _____.

We are not to give him any _____ to work his craft (Eph. 4:27).

We check the devil with a simple _____ to cooperate.

"Get behind me Satan" (Matt. 16:23).

We properly _____ ourselves for spiritual combat (Eph. 6:11, 13).

But resist him, firm in your faith

Faith is our hearty _____ upon the promises of God in Christ.

***knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being
accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.***

One thing that will make our commitment firmer is the awareness that we are
not struggling _____.