

What You Should Know about the Devil

Why Should You Put on the Armor of God?

My wife homeschooled all of our children. The benefit of it was that she could add the Bible to their education. One of her more famous lessons was teaching them the passage on the armor of God and helping them memorize it word for word. She used a teaching mechanism to help them learn it. They were taught motions to go along with each part of it, putting on the helmet of salvation and actually pretending to do so, taking up the shield of faith, buckling on the belt of truth, and all the rest. In fact it wasn't just our kids she taught this; it was numerous other children who came to her Bible classes. Perhaps you already know some of the parts of the armor of God. The Lord makes it clear that we must put on the full armor of God but the question we will look at today is "Why?" Why should we put on the full armor of God? Our Big Idea is: Do not underestimate the power of the devil to wreck you.

God actually makes clear why the armor of God is so crucial to you. **Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.** (Ephesians 6: 22-23 NIV) Keep in mind this is a direct message from God to you. He is commanding you, for your own protection, to put on the full armor of God. There are three points made here. The first point is that the devil schemes against you. The term translated "schemes" is the Greek noun "methodeia" and describes cunning planning. The devil has a well thought through plan to wreck you and ruin the potential God has given you. It is not haphazard or simple-minded but rather, with great cruelty carefully put together. It is not the gross sins he is trying to entice you into embracing like heavy drug usage or even adultery although both can serve his purpose. He merely wants to destabilize your loyalty to God, convince you to lose your confidence in Christ at the micro level. It is almost always not in the devil's best interest to pull you into a murderous rampage or robbing banks. These sorts of sins can actually push you to see the ugliness of your soul and desire a new life that only God can provide. An illustration may help underscore this. The devil probably felt like it was a great victory when he seduced David into lusting after Bathsheba. David's sin did create great havoc for him, his family and probably for Bathsheba also. However, David became distraught over the grossness of his sin and repented decidedly and returned to pure and devoted loyalty to the LORD. His son, Solomon on the other hand shipwrecked his faith in God by bits and pieces. The Devil did not lure him into murder or anything nefarious like that. In fact, in the court of public opinion he was perhaps a hero. He accumulated great wealth, was highly successful and had thousands of wives and concubines. He was the epitome of the American dream. What the devil did with him though was brilliant. He used Solomon's many pagan wives to dull his affection for God, turned his success into greed and if the book of Ecclesiastes is a fair measure of how he fell, made him into a man of despair and emptiness. Solomon laid the foundation for paganism in his country, infused the lust for more into his children, particularly his son Rehoboam, and weakened the moral fabric of the nation. The devil's plan, which clearly he learned from his previous mistake with David worked perfectly with Solomon. The devil when he is on his game, is a master at wrecking you without you even knowing it.

The second point made is that your struggles are not against flesh and blood. We often make the mistake that the chaos of our world is rooted in those we meet, read about or argue against. The most profound evidence of this being not the case is Jesus' command for all Christians to love their enemies. **But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,** (Matthew 5: 44 NIV) This is completely irrational if the source of our troubles, tragic experiences and heartaches are the people around us. If so, then curse out the driver who cuts you off, get steamed with the one who gives you poor service at the restaurant, take revenge on the rapist or argue with those who are for the candidate you despise. It is quite simple if our battle is with the flesh and blood people we live with or who are halfway around the world. Hate them and curse them and fight them. They are right there for you, tangible and definable. But if Jesus is God, as we say He is, then the root of all trouble, pain and sorrow is not those we can touch or see, it is something far more difficult for us to grasp or comprehend. If you rage against your spouse, your supervisor or your "anti-christ" political opponent, then you have rejected Jesus as Lord and relegated Him to the status of someone who can be wrong on these things. The rule is never anything else but "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" because they are just people like you who have the same real enemy, the devil. Keep in mind that when you turn away, even at the smallest point from God's commands, and loving your enemies is certainly one of them, you are falling in line with the devil and buying into his lies. He has become your lord. Your struggle is not against flesh and blood.

Here is a clear example of this and it is most enlightening. An argument broke out between the disciples as to who was the greatest of them. Jesus then both gently rebuked them for not realizing their calling as followers of Him was to be servants to one another but also commended them for their loyalty as disciples. But then without warning, Jesus shifted the spotlight on Peter. **"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."** (Luke 22: 31-32 NIV) If you did not have this critical piece of information, you would completely assess incorrectly what happened later. We do not know for sure what sifting as wheat meant but it is pretty safe to assume Jesus was referring to the three times Peter rejected being affiliated with Jesus and acted as a coward. **A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.** (Luke 22: 56-57 NIV) This of course happened two more times with others confronting Peter. In the end, the rooster crowed according to Jesus' prophecy of the three denials by Peter and Peter wept bitterly at his failure. If we did not know better, we would either mock Peter for his cowardice or shake our heads in pity at his weakness. Never, would it cross our minds that Satan had anything to do with this. But he did. He was in fact critical to it all. Is this such a weird and spooky circumstance as we would typically think of Satanic influence? Of course not. It was a very normal and human sort of moment. And yet Satan was at the center of it all, undetected and uninhibited.

Notice carefully the details of Jesus' warning to Peter. First, Satan was behind in some way we are ignorant of knowing, the denials. Satan sifted Peter as wheat. Second, he could not just encroach on Peter's life, Satan had to ask permission of Jesus. Much like what happened with Job who lived a prosperous and peaceful life until Satan asked the Lord for permission to wreak havoc on Job, Satan begged the Lord to go after Peter. Both of these bits of information are crucial for you to grasp. Satan is behind the chaos in your life, even at times when it seems you are "being blessed" and in conjunction, Satan cannot do anything to you unless Jesus authorizes it and this last part is very comforting. Keep this very much in mind. God can take the wreckage Satan creates and make it turn out in the end for your good. **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.** (Romans 8: 28 NIV) Some might say that if God fixes everything for you, why be concerned about what the devil might do. Peter knew full well the capability of the devil and how terrible it was to be caught in his grip. Why else would Peter warn you so vigorously as he does? **Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.** (1 Peter 5: 8-9 NIV) It is a top priority for you to be alert and do what you can to protect yourself from the devil.

The third point God makes is this. Spiritual forces of evil are very present now. The term translated "heavenlies" does not mean heaven. It simply describes the nonphysical arena of things...not of the earthy realm. That is why it is so hard for you to consider the danger before you. You cannot touch or smell or hear or see these powerful forces of evil. Just because I cannot see the studios creating the content I watch on TV does not mean they don't exist. The evidence of them is the product they create. We can be certain of the evil forces impacting you and those you love because you see the chaos all about you. The great warning of God, the trumpet warning is clear now to you. Do everything you can to not be tricked or beguiled or tossed about by Satan. The devil has Satan equipped to expose your life to every form of temptation and evil and disgrace possible. The brief interaction between Eve and the serpent is illuminating. Eve invited Satan into the world by engaging the Serpent into a conversation. The more Eve spoke with him, the greater his impact on her and Adam too. **Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."** (Genesis 3: 1-5 NIV) Right away Eve was trapped. We use the term exit strategy to describe a way of getting out of a tough, humiliating or destructive situation. The exit strategy for Eve was quit simple. As soon as Satan questioned God's rule about the trees, she should have immediately excused herself and gone to God or at the least Adam. She didn't and that was her downfall. There is always a point when Satan comes after you that you can escape his grip. The window of opportunity sometimes is narrow, but it is always there. The Big Idea is this. Do not underestimate the power of the devil to wreck you. If you do, it could cost you dearly. Run to God. Do not pause, do not ponder, run to God immediately and He will get you out of the trap.