

1st Peter 5:8-11

Resisting a Ferocious Adversary

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith... 5:8,9a

When Peter wrote to the strangers scattered abroad of their adversary the devil, he certainly knew whereof he spoke. How would you like to stand in his shoes, so to speak, and hear the Lord say to you what He said to Peter in Lk. 22:31 *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.* How would you like to hear those words spoken to you by One who knew with certainty that this is what the devil wanted?

On the other hand, you could say of the devil that he's no respecter of persons. He'll take any Christian and sift him as wheat. He'll stake his claim to any of his former subjects. Our text makes it clear that he *walketh about* other versions say *prowls around seeking whom he may devour*. He's no more picky about who he pounces on than a lion would be selective about the beast it chooses for its prey. And when you search the Scriptures and take note of those that experience the devil's attacks then you come to realize at once that the devil respects no one and he's impressed with no one.

Hast thou considered my servant Job – Christ asks Satan. And Satan isn't impressed. Indeed, Satan doesn't have sufficient respect for Christ Himself to stay away from Him. So we read that when Christ's testing time in the wilderness had run its course and Christ had done battle with the devil we read in Lk. 4:13 *And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.* Note those last 3 words – *for a season*. Even though Christ had defeated him and refused to submit to him, still the devil would not concede defeat but would only depart for a season.

And so Peter sees fit, in wrapping up his epistle, to remind his readers that they face a spiritual adversary. And what's true for Peter's readers is true for you and me. You have an adversary. There is a powerful and wise spiritual being that is against you. The same adversary that succeeded in bringing Adam and Eve to ruin in the garden of Eden is alive today and is as active today as he's been in any generation.

Listen to these words by the Puritan Thomas Brooks on the activity of Satan: *Satan promises the best, but pays with the worst; he promises honor and pays with disgrace; he promises pleasure and pays with pain; he promises profit and pays with loss; he promises life and pays with death.*

J.C. Ryle says of the devil – *Nowhere perhaps is the devil so active as in a congregation of gospel-hearers.* And again: *There is no enemy worse than an enemy who is never seen and never dies, who is near to us wherever we live and goes with us wherever we go.*

And because he prowls around seeking whom he may devour, Peter devotes this closing section of his epistle to warning Christians about this ravaging lion and instructing them as to what they're to do in the light of the existence of this fierce spiritual adversary. We're to

resist him, you see. *Whom resist stedfast in the faith* Peter writes in v. 9. We're to be sober because of him and we're to be ever on our guard or ever watchful because of him. The worst thing a Christian can do is to dismiss the whole matter of the devil or the devil's purpose. Certainly those Christians are most vulnerable who are most careless about their need to be sober and vigilant.

So I want to focus on Peter's instructions this morning that pertain to how we're to live and what we're to do in the light of our spiritual adversary. Specifically I want to draw your attention to his exhortation in v. 9 which tells us in effect:

We Must Resist Our Adversary The Devil

And in the moments that remain I'd like to address how this done – how we resist this powerful adversary. As cunning and deceitful and powerful as he is, our text this morning encourages us by making us realize that this powerful foe can be resisted. How, then, can we, as Christians, most effectively resist Satan? Consider with me first of all that if you would resist your adversary:

I. You Must Know about Him

I think that anyone in the military who is involved in formulating the most effective strategy for engaging the enemy is to know your enemy – know what he's capable of – know what his purposes and strategies are.

Joel Beeke has written a book with the title "Fighting Satan." In that book he quotes the Puritan Thomas Brooks as saying: "Christ, the Scripture, your own hearts, and Satan's devices, are the four prime things that should be first and most studied and searched." If we have poorly formed ideas about Satan's goals, strengths, and limitations, we become careless. We underestimate the power of our enemy.

There is a danger to overestimating or underestimating Satan's power. So Dr. Beeke notes: "Do not overestimate or underestimate Satan. He is not God or even a fallen deity, and he is not almighty. He is only a fallen angel. Yet Satan is a powerful enemy. John Blanchard writes, "We are opposed by a living, intelligent, resourceful and cunning enemy who can outlive the oldest Christian, outwork the busiest, outfight the strongest and outwit the wisest."

It's fascinating to think that even though he is a created being and he doesn't possess the attributes of deity, he nevertheless goes back a long way – all the way back to the beginning of time. We're not told when he was created. It's a matter of some speculation as to whether he predates Genesis 1 or not. None of the angels are mentioned in the 6 days of creation. We can point to particular days in which certain things were created but we can't do that with the angels.

I favor the view that sees them as being in existence before the creation account of Genesis. It seems that God wanted an audience on hand for His work of creation and the

angels seem to fulfill that purpose. So we read in Job 38:4-7 *Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. 5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? 6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; 7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?*

Do you see how the angels were present to behold God laying the foundations of the earth, stretching the line upon it and fastening the foundations? They go back a long way and yet they are most definitely created beings. So we read of them in Psalm 148:5 *Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.*

So Satan goes back a long way and he has been on hand for all the ups and downs of the history of redemption. He's certainly been on hand long enough to know what works and what doesn't and under what circumstances certain strategies will work to pull down Christians. And not only do we need to know who we're dealing with but we need to understand his purposes.

When Christ revealed to Peter in Lk. 22 that Satan desired to have him that he may sift him as wheat, Christ said to Peter *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.* In that statement by Christ you can readily see what Satan's aim is. He wants your faith to fail. Did you get that? Do you understand that brothers and sisters in Christ? The devil wants your faith to fail.

He wants you to lose confidence in God. We saw last week when we studied v. 7 how he wants to convince you that God does not care for you. If he can convince you that God doesn't care for you then he will have succeeded in making it impossible for you to cast your burden upon the Lord. Your ability to cast that burden depends on how strongly you're convinced that He cares for you. If your faith fails and you become convinced that He's indifferent toward you or that He takes no interest in you then you'll bear the weight of that burden yourself and it will crush you to despair.

So he wants your faith to fail. Isn't that basically what the devil tried to do to Job? He was convinced that he could cause Job's faith to fail and as a result Job would curse God to His face. But not only does he want your faith to fail so he might turn you against God but he would also turn you against others. Where the devil succeeds in his devouring work, Christians follow his path and take up that devouring work themselves.

So Paul admonishes the Galatians in language that is so graphic and in words that are so ironic he writes in Gal. 5:15 *But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.* I think you could say that the devil's devouring power is behind Christians biting and devouring one another. And this is what the devil desires within church families and it's what he desires in our organic families. He wants husbands and wives to devour each other; he wants parents to devour their children and children to devour their parents. He wants siblings to devour each other. It's his aim, you see, to divide and defile and deceive and destroy.

So we must know who it is we're resisting when Peter tells us to resist the devil. Don't ever make the mistake of playing the devil for some sort of cartoon character. He's very real and he hates Christians. But let's move on to consider:

II. How We are To Resist Him

It's important to know something about who we're resisting but it becomes equally important to know how he is to be resisted. Peter gives us 3 very specific exhortations that pertain to our conflict with the devil. The first exhortation is found in v. 8 – *Be sober* he writes.

I know there's a cultural meaning to that word in our day that means to be sober as opposed to being drunk. When a person comes under the influence of alcohol he loses his senses and he lets down his guard. I probably make the point every time I come across the word *sober* in Scripture that alcohol isn't the only thing that can intoxicate us. The world can intoxicate you. You can become so obsessed with the things of this world that those things become the driving force of your life. You live to make more money so you can have more things. You desire bigger and better things and while there's nothing wrong with enjoying the things that the Lord enables you to buy, if you fall under the influence of those things so that they become the driving force in your life, then you've become drunk with the world.

And a person who has become drunk with the world has let down his guard. In a sense you might say that he's become the devil's prisoner. Most of his discussions in Christian circles raise questions about what's wrong with this, or what's wrong with that? What's wrong with this practice or some other worldly activity. And the answer may be that there's nothing wrong with those things in and of themselves until they become such masters of your soul that your life, if not your words, says that you can't live without this, that, or the other thing.

So there's different forms of drunkenness. I read one commentator that made a point that is very true to the context of our text when he pointed out that it's possible to be drunk with anxiety. *Casting all your care on him* v. 7 reads – other versions translate it *casting all your anxieties on him*. In this condition a Christian is under the influence of those anxieties. He goes through sleepless night and troublesome days because he's so obsessed with what might happen and how bleak things may become.

In contrast to being under the influence of the world, or the cares of the world, the Christian is to be sober. It's interesting to note some other translations of this Greek term. Most English translations utilize the word *sober* but there's a few perhaps more obscure English versions that use different words. *Be serious* one English version reads. And that's certainly a good application to draw from being sober. I like the way another English versions says *Be clear-minded*. When you're clear minded then your brain isn't in a fog. Your thinking becomes spiritual and scriptural. You think the way God thinks or you think God's thoughts after Him.

So that's the first exhortation of Peter – *Be sober*. The second exhortation immediately follows and goes hand in hand with being sober. *Be sober* and *be vigilant*. Be watchful in other words or be alert as some versions translate the word. This brings to mind the challenge that Christ put to His sleepy disciples in the garden of Gethsemane beneath the shadow of the cross.

So we read in Mt 26:40 *And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?* The most important event in the history of redemption was about to take place which would be Christ going to Calvary's cross. And Peter along with the others couldn't come close to grasping the importance of what was at stake. They were sleepy.

I can't deny that one of the things that amazes me about so many Christians in our day is that they appear to be so sleepy. A sleepy Christian, you see, is a prayerless Christian and a prayerless Christian is a Christian that really has no appreciation for what's at stake and how dangerous the times are. We're seeing things happen in this nation like never before in terms of the wickedness that's being foisted upon us by our culture and by our government. And yet Christians to a great degree seem oblivious to it all.

These are days that call for prayer, even for fasting and prayer. These are days that call for corporate prayer. I dare say that our days are very much like the days the prophet Joel has in view in his book. Listen to his call from Joel 2:15 *Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: 16 Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. 17 Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?*

Wouldn't you agree that the kind of day Joel has in mind aligns with the kind of days in which we live? These are not days that call for spiritual sleepiness they're days that call for solemn assemblies; they're days that call for a serious adjusting of priorities; they're days that call for fasting and prayer and repentance and crying to our God for our children to be spared. The Christian who is sober and vigilant will know this and will respond accordingly.

You could say that these first two exhortations from Peter, then, set the tone or call for the right kind of attitude toward the times and toward our adversary. And with a serious, or clear-headed mindset that is ever watchful there follows the call, then, to resistance. Note again the words of the text: *Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour; Whom resist.*

As Christians we are a part of a resistance movement. Whenever I think of resistance movements I think of France during WWII. When their nation was overrun by the Nazis, there were those that resisted that Nazi government. They cooperated and fought alongside of the Allied forces and they provided valuable intelligence information to the Allies about

Nazi defenses, and troop movements etc. So are we part of a resistance movement that is called upon by God to resist the devil's wicked and ungodly policies that are being foisted upon our nation like never before. That's the perspective of our resistance from a very broad point of view. Our resistance also includes our being steadfast on a very personal level.

And the way this resistance must take place is given to us in the same verse. *Whom resist steadfast in the faith.* There's the key to our resistance. We must be steadfast in the faith. And being steadfast in the faith can be viewed in two ways also. It can be viewed from an objective perspective and from a subjective perspective.

Resist the devil by being steadfast in the faith. Very often when you see the word *faith* with a definite article before it such as what we have in our text by the words *the faith*. Usually the phrase *the faith* refers to the objective things that you're to believe. Another way to say *resist steadfast in the faith* would be to say *resist by being grounded in the gospel*. Know what you believe, in other words, and why you believe it.

You must know the basis for your acceptance with God. You must know about Christ and what He's done to bring about that acceptance. You must know how He can be just and the justifier of those that believe in Jesus (Rom. 3:26). You must know and appreciate the meaning of Christ being the propitiation for your sins. You must know how Christ, being that propitiation bore the just wrath of His heavenly Father and satisfied Divine justice that way.

These are the things, you see, that take away the devil's leverage over you. His leverage over you is your sin and his leverage is the law that exposes sin and if you don't know how the gospel of Christ answers to the devil's accusations about you and your sin then you won't know how to resist him. You won't be equipped to resist him. So you must resist him by being steadfast in the faith – the faith making reference to what you believe about Christ and about the gospel.

There is a subjective element to being steadfast in the faith also. And when I speak of the subjective element to the faith, I'm making reference to the exercise of your faith. Faith, you see, does not consist only in what we give assent to in our minds. Faith is something that is practiced. Faith is something that is exercised.

And just as your body becomes fit through the proper use of exercise, so your soul becomes fit by the proper use of the exercise of your faith. And how do you exercise your faith? In a sense you're doing that very thing here this morning in the place of worship. I hope it's by faith that you raise your voice to God in the singing of psalms and hymns. I hope it's by faith that you pray when the preacher prays or when someone is called on to lead in prayer. You're to pray along with the preacher or that person called on to lead.

I hope you're exercising faith when you turn to God's word for the reading or preaching of that word. And when you leave God's house and you tend to your various vocations, I hope you do so by faith. Faith, you see, encompasses everything you do. Col 3:17 *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, [do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to*

God and the Father by him. Col. 3:23,25 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

Do you exercise your faith that way? Do you consider your vocation to be your Divine calling? You should. And if you do then you'll engage in your work wholeheartedly with the aim of glorifying your Father in heaven. And in this exercise of faith you take the battle to the devil. You do more than withstand and resist him. You aim for the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

It's a good exercise you know to engage in very specific and deliberate acts of faith. By faith I'm going to speak a word for Christ this day. By faith I'm going to be sure to give God the glory in anything I do that gains me the notice of men. If I'm commended for being a hard worker I'm going to make sure that the one commending me knows what drives me.

So in this fashion, by being steadfast in the faith we resist the devil and we advance Christ's cause. I conclude this study by reminding you that you are in a battle while you're in this world. Peter reminds his readers that the afflictions they were experiencing were being experienced by others. *Knowing* he goes on to write in v. 9 *that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.*

This statement points to our need for each other. We need to build up each other; we need to assure each other; we need to encourage each other in such a way that we know that we're all in the same battle and that we fight our battles together. The author of Hebrews certainly captures the same spirit as Peter when he writes in Heb. 10:23: *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) 24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

And in this way we will resist and not only resist but be more than conquerors through Him that loved us. Make sure, then, that you tend to your faith, that you build yourselves up in your most holy faith, that you contribute to being well grounded in the faith and that you engage in deliberate actions for the exercise of your faith.