

“Know Your Enemy, Part 2: His Tactics”

(John 8:44)

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Introduction:

We all very aware of the number 1 story in the news in North America this past week. And as we heard about this news we were all horrified. And then we heard he was an Asian and I think a lot of might have been thinking...let him not be a Korean...or if you're Chinese...let him not be Chinese. And then it was revealed that he was in fact Korean and I think a lot of our hearts sank. At first we were so sorry for the victims, and then their family and friends. But at least for me, as I continued to follow this story, I also began to feel sorry for Seung Hui Cho as well. I began to wonder, what happened to him in his past that would make him do that. Sure he had some mental issues. But was it purely mental or chemical or were there environmental and experiential factors involved as well? And as new bits of information began to be released, it was said that he was tormented by his peers for this and that. And I wonder what his family life was like. And then I heard he was from a church going family. So how was he in church? What was going on in his spiritual life? And so on and so on. We'll probably never know the whole story.

Now I warned all of us last week to be careful of demonize every situation seeing a devil in every bad thing that happens. But I couldn't help but wonder what kind of influence the devil had on this young man. I wonder what spiritual battles were going on within him. It's not a far stretch of the imagination to think and believe that the devil was somehow involved in this tragedy, directly or indirectly; especially when we look at today's text which describes our enemy, the devil.

In any case, all of us should praying to the Prince of Peace for the healing of everyone involved and for our neighbors down south.

As all of us are in a fierce spiritual battle, we must become familiar with the devil's tactics. What does he do over and over again to disable us, harm us and make us fail in our lives of obedience to God and victory over sin and evil? When you and I learn how he operates, I believe we will be able to better retaliate and be victorious.

John 8:44 ⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

1. I think one of things he's quite happy with is to know that much of the westernized world doesn't believe that the Devil exists. So if we mythologize him or make him into a caricature or better yet, to just ignore him, I think he'd be very satisfied; just as long as we don't believe in him.

Many of you know the famous book written by C.S. Lewis called the Screwtape Letters. I started reading it again in preparation for this series and it's an ingenious and terribly creative book. I highly recommend it to all of you. He writes this fiction, which is heavily based on the bible teaching on the devil and demons, between two demonic characters. There's the underling demon named Wormwood and then there's his mentor, advisor named Uncle Screwtape. So

Wormwood is set off to be the demon that will tempt and influence a certain man. And so he tries this tactic and that tactic and reports to his uncle and his uncle either praises him or reprimands him for his successes and failures. And whenever he fails, Uncle Screwtape offers him wise counsel on how to most effectively ruin this man's life.

Here's one of the things Screwtape says to Wormwood.

My Dear Wormwood,

I wonder you should ask me whether it is essential to keep the patient in ignorance of your own existence. That question, at least for the present phase of the struggle, has been answered for us by the High Command. Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves. Of course this has not always been so. We are really faced with a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and skeptics. ... I do not think you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. The fact that "devils" are predominately comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old textbook method of confusing them) he therefore cannot believe in you.

Your affectionate uncle

Screwtape

So for starters, we need to take our foe seriously. We cannot simply ignore him or make him out to be something that he isn't.

2. Takes away the word

Matthew 13:19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

We'll talk more about this next week, but I believe the Devil knows the bible inside out. I believe he knows the power of God's word. He knows the power of the word of God to create something out of nothing. He knows the power of the word of God to carry forth God's will. He knows the power of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, God's Son. And I believe he also understands the power of the written word of God, the bible. He probably knows its power to save sinners and turn regular saints into great saints. So whenever he has the opportunity he will take away the word. He will make us neglect it, not read it. He will make us get into the word but will keep the word from getting into us. He's cause us to be drowsy when we pick up the bible or hear a sermon. So be on your guard against this tactic.

3. He attacks leaders (Peter, Paul, Jesus, David, Job.)

Whenever we see a leader fall, she shouldn't just gloss over it with indifference, think, "Well, there goes another one." We shouldn't be judgmental, knowing that we too can be vulnerable and that Satan specifically focuses his attacks on leaders. We should be in remorse, we should be angry at the evil one, and we should fight back with prayer.

4. He tempts us (Matt 4; 1 Cor 7:5) This is his bread and butter.

Specifically, he incites us to go against the will of God. He tries to thwart the plan of God, and

get us to go against God's ways. (1Chr. 21:1ff; Matt 4:1-11; 16:23)

5. He prevents missionary activity (1 Thes 2:18)

1 Thessalonians 2:18 (18) For we wanted to come to you-- certainly I, Paul, did, again and again-- but Satan stopped us.

6. He's a fake, a master of imitation (2 Cor 11:13-15; 2Thes 2:9-10)

I think one of his great tactics is that he replaces truth with emotions. So he wants us to base the quality of something based on emotion, rather than on truth. When we get into a brand of spirituality that's highly emotional, often times there's an absence of focus on the truth and the use of our intellectual abilities. Whenever spirituality becomes 'a come and feel' experience, at the expense of 'a come and think' experience, then I believe it's headed the wrong way. What we want is a biblical balance of intense emotion based on unwavering truth.

For example, there are bad worship songs, there are good worship songs and there are great worship songs. And what sets apart the good from the great? A perfect combination of intense emotion based on unwavering truth. *Like the song by Matt Redman, "Blessed Be Your Name" that was written in the wake of 9/11. When you think about lyrics of that song you see that it's a song based on the truth that we must praise the Lord in the good and plentiful times as well as the rough and tumble times. In both situations we need to say, 'blessed be the name of the Lord.'* And Christians all over the world love this song for it's bang-on biblical truth AND it's high emotional content. That's the balance we need to achieve.

But the devil, knowing we are emotional people, gets us focusing on the emotional, rather than the intellectual or mental. Now again, C.S. Lewis was incredibly insightful in this matter. Listen to some of things he writes in the Screwtape Letters. In talking about how new Christians are on an emotional high, they are bound to come down. You and I all know that. We can't remain in that elevated state forever. And that initial state is highly emotional for most people. The grass is greener, the air is fresher, people are more lovely, and God is good. But soon that passes. The emotions die down and QTs become hard. Sin is right back in our faces. So Screwtape says to Wormwood,
"If once they get through this initial dryness successfully, they become much less dependent on emotion and therefore much harder to tempt."

And then a bit later he says this about emotion and prayer. *[When they pray] Keep them watchin their own minds and trying to produce feelings there by the action of their own wills. When they meant to ask Him for charity, let them, instead, start tryin to manufacture charitable feelings for themselves and not notice that this is what they are doing. When they meant to pray for courage, let them really be trying to feel brave. When they say they are praying for forgiveness, let them be trying to feel forgiven. Teach them to estimate the value of each prayer by their success in producing the desired feeling. (21)*

7. Now this final thing is partly from scripture and partly from my experience as a Christian and as a pastor. Right before Jesus public ministry began, He was guided by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness in order to be tested. We know that he was tempted three times and he came out on top three times, but do you remember what it said after that?

Luke 4:13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

The devil wasn't finished. He doesn't give up that easily. Throughout the three years of Jesus' ministry we see encounter upon encounter with the evil spiritual realm. There were countless encounters with people who were demon possessed. One in particular in Mark 5 when he encountered a demon-possessed man in the Geresenes and once he cleaned out the thousand or more demons from the man, he sent them into pigs which hurled themselves over a cliff. He faced severe temptation countless times, so much so the book of Hebrews says he was tempted in every way.

Sure, I believe there are instances where the Devil does something catastrophic in peoples lives, but I think what he aims to do is to change us one degree at a time. What's one degree right? Think of when you were the most in-line, in-tune with God. Think of when that was. You were reading the bible regularly. You were praying frequently and fervently. You were serving him diligently. You were highly sensitive to sin and temptation. Try to remember that time when everything was clicking.

Now, what if the devil's goal was to just get us one degree off center per year. That's all he aims to do. He'll take more if we give it to him, but let's just say he's only interested in one degree. So he'll attack our prayer life and get that off by one degree. The next year he'll attack our bible reading and meditation. The following year, he'll try to get us as self-righteous in our own interpretation of religion. The following year, he'll work on a judgmental spirit. The following year he'll help us think that the success we've had in life is a sign of God's blessing and get us thinking that whatever it was that we were not doing, to keep not doing it. Then he'll throw in busyness and help us rationalize our sliding and he'll help us say...it's okay...God understands. Then he'll make us look at the precious gifts called children...and he loves to do this. I see it in a lot of families. And he'll twist our view of family so that we begin to convince ourselves...family first, God second. Ten years later, and our lives have been shifted ten or more degrees off center. Twenty years later, and we can be off the radar.

That's what the devil aims to do. He doesn't care if we turn over like a dead cockroach tomorrow or ten years from now. So long as we're on the path of turning over.

Folks, let's not be naïve. Examine where your spirit is. Think of what lies we may have bought into. Determine where it turned off centered. Commit to do whatever it takes to get back on course. The Devil has only one thing in mind. Since he can't have our souls of those that are truly Christian, he'll take whatever we give him. He'll take spiritual impotence. He'll take a compromised life. He'll take pseudo religiosity. He'll take self-righteousness. If that's the closest to victory he'll ever get, then he'll take it. I don't believe he's that picky.

Other things

- He wants us to remain in sin (eph 4:25-29)
- He wants us to knowingly, but most times unknowingly, do his bidding (2Tim 2:23-ff)
- He wants to sift us like wheat (Luk 22:31-32)
he wants to pick us apart and leave us in pieces
- He falsely accuses us (Zechariah 3:1-4)
- He can attack us physically (Job, Paul's thorn).

If we were to sum up all of his activity and all of his tactics against us and against God, we can say that basically everything he does is based on lies. The bible, in the book of James tells us what the devil knows about God.

So he will do anything and everything to get us to live our lives based on his lies. He'll say whatever needs to be said. He'll twist all of God's truth. He'll lie to us about what God is like, like he did to Eve in the garden. He'll lie to us about our relationship to him. He'll lie to us about our eternal security. He'll get us focused on all of the wrong things. He'll get us focusing on all the secondary or wrong stuff about our lives with God instead of what's primary. He'll make us think that our acts of religion are good enough.

What might be some of the specific lies he wants us to believe today?

Take any percentage less than 100%, let's say 85%. And he'll get us to believe, 85% commitment to God is good enough.

He'll say, just be better than the next guy. Measure your standards against men, not God

He says, God will never forgive you. You've sinned too much.

He'll say, God can never use you.

He'll say, don't take that risk. Don't step out in faith. There's too much at stake. It'll be too costly.

You can have your cake and eat it too. Enjoy the best of both worlds.

Just maintain the appearance of being spiritual. You don't really have to be spiritual. Be a minimalist, not a maximalist.

Relationships aren't that important.

Don't believe a single one of them.

Conclusion:

Those are some of his tactics. He's cunning and crafty. He will never tell the truth. In fact he cannot tell the truth. He isn't to be trusted. You and I must remain on our guard, we must be alert as the bible says in 1 Peter 5:8

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Next week we'll look at our defense and offence against the enemy and how we can be victorious and triumphant in our battle against him.