

Soldier Up!

Saints & Spiritual Warfare

"The Thrilla with Belial"

The *Thrilla in Manila* was the third and final boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier.

It was a brutal fight. Ali would later claim it was the closest to dying in the ring he had ever been. Ali won when Frazier's corner stopped the fight prior to the fifteenth round.

After Round 11, Frazier indicated that he could not see some of the punches he was being hit with. He was nearly blind in his left eye since a training accident in 1965, and now his right eye was badly swollen from Ali's barrage of head shots.

At this point, Frazier's trainer, Eddie Futch, gave him what turned out to be poor advice - he told his fighter to stand more upright when approaching Ali rather than continuing his usual bobbing and weaving style.

Ali seized upon this immediately in Round 12. With his back to the ropes, he threw punches with both hands that landed accurately, and did still more damage to Frazier's limited eyesight.

Eddie Futch's poor advice contributed to Joe Frazier taking a beating, and losing the fight.

Since our 'fight,' our warfare, is against a masterful and malevolent spiritual foe and his armies, we need good, rock solid advice on how to fight. No one wants a beat-down from the devil.

It only makes sense that someone who has gone up against the devil can give us insight and advice. The particular someone I have in mind tonight is the great apostle Paul.

Paul mentioned the devil, one way or another, quite often in his letters. It was a matter of fact for him that we are in a spiritual fight.

If we take a look at most of Paul's references to the devil, it should give us good advice in the ring.

Tonight we'll look at some of the things Satan did, and does, to believers in general. Next time we are together, we will look at two assaults that Satan made directly against Paul - one to hinder him, the other to hobble him.

There is a general reference to what we ought to expect from Satan in the famous spiritual armor section of Ephesians, when Paul says,

Eph 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the **wiles** of the devil.

The word "wiles" can be translated *schemes*. This puts you on notice that the devil is constantly scheming against you, behind the scenes. He has a strategy to rob, kill and destroy you.

Although it isn't funny, we sometimes joke with people who aren't enduring any suffering by saying, "Just wait!"

It isn't funny, because the devil **is** scheming against them. And he's doing it on many fronts at once. And he is patient, setting things up, sometimes, for decades.

Remember, though, that the spiritual armor passage is hopeful that you will be enabled to stand, and withstand, the schemes, and even gain ground.

But only if you are prepared for battle - constantly vigilant, as a deployed soldier.

In Ephesians 6:16, Paul describes Satan's attacks as flaming arrows. These would be more obvious, frontal assaults. They are extinguished by utilizing the shield of faith; in other words, realizing that we can withstand any assault as we continue in faith.

We looked at Job last time. Talk about an assault by Satan! To us, it seems Job was riddled with flaming arrows that penetrated his defenses.

In point of fact, Job's faith remained intact; he endured by faith.

Hmm. The shield of faith isn't exactly what you thought, was it? It's more a shield for the heart; it's not a guarantee Satan won't land any punches - or, in context, arrows. They might hit their mark, but we **will** "quench" their flame when we endure by faith.

Let's look at a few more specific things Satan does to put you in danger.

Second Corinthians 2:5-11 deals with the man who had been disciplined by the congregation at Corinth. He had repented, and wanted to be restored to fellowship.

Paul says,

[2Co 2:8](#) Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him...

2Co 2:11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

For lots of reasons, the Corinthians were hesitant to receive the repentant sinner back into full fellowship. In their case, they ought to have forgiven him - forgiving him as Jesus had forgiven them.

First, the Corinthians extended too much grace, tolerating sin in their assembly. Then, they extended too little forgiveness.

Thus Paul said, "for we are not ignorant of his devices," meaning the devil is constantly seizing upon **every** situation that presents itself, to twist it to his advantage.

He will take advantage of our every failing, of our every shortfall. We don't need to be perfect; just correctable, in order to do the right thing, at the right time, as prescribed by the Bible.

A little later in Second Corinthians, Paul mentioned the devil again.

2Co 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

2Co 6:15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

"Belial" occurs only here in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, it is a word that describes evil men and behavior in general, but among the Jews it became a proper name for the devil.

Oxen plowing in the field were "yoked" in teams of two in order to accomplish their task.

It's super-important we understand the context in which Paul said this. In verse sixteen we read, "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?"

It seems the immediate context was the practice of some in Corinth to attend idolatrous feasts and eat the food that had been sacrificed to idols. You could buy the meats later, in the marketplace; but you should not be at the temples, participating in the rituals, just for a good cut of steak.

Other relationships that involve being "yoked" with a nonbeliever are inherently dangerous to a believer.

- We could certainly apply this to marriages between believers and nonbelievers. This is enhanced by Paul's teaching in First Corinthians seven, where he indicates that marriage should be "in The Lord" (v39).
- What about business partnerships? I can see it applying there, too.

What is odd, to me, is that, on a practical level, we **only** seem to apply this to marriage, giving believers involved in idolatrous practices, or those in weird business partnerships, a free pass.

You and I must beware of close relationships **of any kind** - personal or professional - that would tend to compromise us as believers.

So, guess what we should expect? We should expect Satan to make that nonbelieving guy or gal super attractive to us... Or that worldly hobby or habit... Or that business deal.

Be careful out there. Once yoked, it begins to chafe, at best, and cripple, at worst.

Still in Second Corinthians, in chapters ten through thirteen, Paul deals with the false teachers who had crept in to the church. Twice he makes reference to Satan:

2Co 11:3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

What God told Adam and Eve was simple. They were free to eat of any tree, except for one. The devil completely reversed this by asking whether God had said that they were not to eat from any tree in the Garden. He exaggerated the extent of God's prohibition, and framed it as if God was restricting them, rather than preserving their freedom.

The point for us is that the devil loves to mess around with what God has said, to put a deceptive spin on it.

2Co 11:13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.

2Co 11:14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

Today, the devil introduces false teaching by using men and women who appear to be sent by God, but who are not.

You must be discerning, and search out the Word for yourself. Otherwise you may end up like those described in Second Timothy 2:25-26,

2Ti 2:25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,

2Ti 2:26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

The people described are those who have embraced the false teaching. Spiritually speaking, they have become prisoners of war - having been taken captive by the devil to do his will.

I've, unfortunately, seen a few folks over the years embrace some crazy doctrine. Where there was once a robust, evangelical faith in Jesus, there is an obsession with the one, particular doctrine, leading to a life of either extreme legalism, or extreme license.

Notice they can return to the truth; and we should struggle to bring them back to it.

Persecution is another way that Satan tries to assault us. Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul said,

1Th 3:4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

1Th 3:5 For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

The "tempter" is the devil, and here he was enticing the believers into abandoning their faith because of the persecution it brought upon them.

Satan is a bully, and, while he will never abandon his behind-the-scenes scheming, often he just punches you in the face with persecution.

The list of qualifications for overseers in First Timothy 3:1-7 includes two references to the devil:

1Ti 3:6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

1Ti 3:7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Don't promote people to a position of leadership too quickly, or it could lead to pride, which was the downfall of the devil.

Furthermore, leaders would seem to be a preferred target for Satan, who sets snares for them that they might lose their integrity and "fall into reproach."

Paul's other references to the devil as our adversary involve certain sexual sins - or, at least, the possibility of falling into them as traps.

In First Corinthians 7:5 we read,

1Co 7:5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

In Corinth, certain married couples thought it was more spiritual to refrain from regular sexual relations and devote themselves, instead, to prayer.

Paul says that's OK, as long as it is by mutual consent, for a limited time, and for the express purpose of prayer.

But you must return to a regular sexual relationship, or else it exposes you or your spouse to temptation.

Hold that thought as we read First Timothy 5:11 & 14-15.

1Ti 5:11 But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry...

1Ti 5:14 Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

1Ti 5:15 For some have already turned aside after Satan.

It seems that the younger widows were holding off marrying, causing them to become "wanton," meaning they were succumbing to sexual temptation.

These Scriptures about sexual sin are a general but serious warning that sex is one area in which the devil will certainly assault every believer - single, married, or widowed.

I read an article the other day, and though it was slightly sensational, it warned that the church is going to come under assault from powerful homosexual activists. The author described institutions that have given up to the idea the homosexuality is not sin, but is, in fact, normal. It started with an assault on the American Psychiatric Academy, and its latest conquest was the Boy Scouts.

Jesus unequivocally condemned ALL sexual sin, including homosexuality, by affirming the "one flesh" paradigm of Genesis (Matthew 19).

We distinguish between same-sex attraction and homosexuality:

- Same-sex attraction is misplaced desires for the same sex that need to be given up to God. It is not sin; it is temptation to sin, and therefore it can and must be resisted.
- Sex outside of marriage is sin, whether it is a man and a woman, or two men, or two women. Period.
- Marriage is to be monogamous, between one man and one woman.

In general, our society is easily the most pornographic ever - simply because of the technologies that exist, and are in our possession.

Satan owns society as far as sexual sin is concerned. We are surrounded by it. We need, therefore, to take our stand, and to withstand the onslaught.

Those, then, are most of the references the apostle Paul makes directly to the devil.

Knowing how he has attacked in the past gives us the 'heads-up' we need to recognize his schemes, and to be ready for his flaming arrows.