



Title	→ Series: Talking About What We Don't Talk About Part 5 (Spiritual Warfare and Satan): Disarming Satan
Scripture	Ephesians 6: 10-20
Minister	The Reverend Matthew Ruttan
Place	Westminster Presbyterian Church, Barrie, ON
Date	February 12 th , 2012
Calendar	6 th Sunday After Epiphany
Note	This text is an approximate rendering

Minister: Peace be with you.
God's people: And also with you.



It's good that you're in church today. It's a key element in ridding Satan of his lust for your life.

Of his lust for your life.

So far in our series of messages called "Talking about what we don't talk about" we have broached the general problem of God often being in the cheap seats in our lives; about politics; about the Second Coming of Christ; and about science and faith. Today we come to what, for me, has been the most difficult thing to wrap my mind around—spiritual warfare and Satan. It's also been the most difficult message for me personally to put together. One of the reasons for this is that I am convinced that I am engaged in some spiritual warfare. So this for me is very personal and I covet your prayers, even now.

It's also something you've asked me about and for which you want to be prepared. It's a blessing for me to be a part of that process. As we've done each week we engage this topic by asking three questions. First: *What* exactly are we talking about? Second: Why *don't* we talk about it? And last: Why *should* we talk about it? So I don't really want to waste time. Let's get to it.



First: What exactly are we talking about?

We are talking about spiritual warfare and Satan. The name Satan is Hebrew and means "the adversary," or "the accuser." In Latin his name is Lucifer. In Greek it's Devil. They all refer to the same being. Pure evil. It's telling that in the Lord's Prayer, the "Our Father," that when we come to the line that says "deliver us from evil," a better translation is probably "deliver us from *the Evil One*." Jesus himself prays that we are protected from Satan!

But we need to be cautious. And here I take a lead from psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, most famously known for his best-selling book *The Road Less Travelled*, who says this in response to participating in actual cases of

possession and exorcism: “ ‘Evil’ is a dangerous word. Speak it carefully—full of care. It is not to be used lightly.”¹

This morning I want to focus on something Satan does. In a general sense his job is to make you his own. Which is another way of saying that *he wants to rip your loyalty from Christ*. He wants to rip your loyalty from Christ. You see, Christ builds the kingdom of God. That’s what he preached about and that’s what he did. Satan, on the other hand, has a different agenda: he wants to build the kingdom of darkness. And every time you come to worship; every time you pray in the name of Christ; every time you engage in an act of humility or love or truth, God uses you to drive another nail in his coffin.

But more specifically, I want to focus on something that lies at the core of his being—and it helps us understand *how* Satan tries to rip our loyalty from Christ. They are words of Jesus from John’s Gospel. Here is what he says: The Devil “was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”² That’s what Jesus calls him, “the father of lies.” That’s who he is. Fundamentally he is a Liar. But what does he lie about?

Satan has a lying way about him which does a few things. We don’t know all his tactics, of course. But here is one of them. First, he finds your vulnerabilities. Second, he feeds you lies that prey on those vulnerabilities. Third, he convinces you—or makes you think it’s you convincing yourself—that you don’t really belong to Jesus. And fourth, he thereby neutralizes you in the work for God’s kingdom on earth. That kind of sounds ‘out there,’ so let me give you an example.

Claire is a young professional who is a Christian. She works in Vancouver in the business district as a human resources manager. One of her vulnerabilities is that she is an overachiever and prone to perfectionism. She’s pretty involved at her church.

But she was stuck in this perfectionism. And if any of you know about perfectionism part of the problem is that you can never be perfect, and so you’re consciously or subconsciously constantly beating yourself up for not being able to do what you think you should be able to do and you also beat yourself up for not being able to be who you think you should be. A little self-criticism can be good to motivate you in life; but Claire’s self-defeating was getting to the point of irrationality. Of paralysis. This perfectionism was her vulnerability. And she had started seeing a psychotherapist to help her deal with it, and never feeling good enough.

Lying in her bed one night, totally exhausted from another day she had a feeling creep up from somewhere deep inside her: I’m stupid, I’m stupid, I’m stupid. The feeling became stronger and gave her a kind of comfort, and it moved from her heart to her head to her lips, quietly. She started saying them over and over to herself until she fell asleep as a kind of soothing mantra: ‘I’m stupid. Yes, I’m stupid. I’m stupid.’

As the weeks went on she started to doubt whether or not she was actually a Christian. She could never live up to Jesus! She could never do all the things he asked! Who was she kidding, she wondered? She was no better than all those hypocrites Jesus’ railed against in Matthew’s Gospel! No wonder the message of stupidity resonated with her, she finally was seeing herself for who she really was. She thought she was finally uncovering the truth!

After another 6 months of psychotherapy her therapist was visibly frustrated about why Claire was not able to break this negative mode of thinking. By this time she had dropped off her worship attendance, had stopped her Bible study, and was throwing herself more and more into her work which, despite all the time she was

investing, was less and less satisfying. The therapist was bewildered until one day he decided to explore those negative words that had entered Claire's consciousness while lying in bed, and which she started to repeat like a calming mantra. Unassuming, but penetrating. 'I'm so stupid, I'm so stupid, I'm so stupid.' "Claire, do you think God is telling you that you're stupid?" "No, of course not," she replied. "Why not?" "Well, it's not like him." There was a brief pause. "Claire," he asked again, "Do you believe in Satan?" "Well, I've never really thought about it," she replied.

That one question started the process of turning everything around. It was the first step back from the battleground that was set within her inner being. You see one of the Liar's tricks is that he can also speak about you in the first person. See how he did it? Satan found her vulnerability, her perfectionism. He preyed on that vulnerability. He started to convince her that she didn't really belong to Jesus. And then he neutralized her in working for God's kingdom.

That's a subtle example. More severe cases are all over the place. But the reason I tell you this and not some more sensational story is because we so often think of Satan as only being interested in big, huge things like wars and taking over people like Hitler—so much so that we fail to see the possibilities of his presence and work all around us.

A friend recently told a story about two people who were driving across the United States, beginning on the east coast and headed to California. One kept seeing these strange signs at the side of the highway, and they kept appearing again and again. They looked like a letter of a Chinese alphabet. They occurred with such frequency that she eventually said to her friend who was driving, 'Am I the only person who doesn't know what that letter of the Chinese alphabet means?' Her friend looked back at her in amazement. "That's not a letter of the Chinese alphabet, that's the symbol for a picnic table."

The signs are all around us of Satan's activity. It's just that we've forgotten how to recognize them.

That's Satan in a nutshell. The Liar. Spiritual warfare, on the other hand, is the invisible battle that is going on all around us. Invisible. One way to think of it is the battle going on between God and Satan, with you potentially being on the battlefield.

Many of us think that we are not in this battle because we don't go out and do satanic things: we don't belong to any cult; we don't sacrifice animals or worship the Devil. Maybe we're not in the battle. And let's pray that it doesn't happen. But it's hard to tell. But he is not always interested in the extraordinary. We get mesmerized by how ordinary everything seems and so we stop looking. But spiritual warfare can be very subtle. Like a small seed falling into a crack in some concrete, but it somehow takes root and grows and slowly heaves the concrete apart. He loves neutralizing people. He simply unplugs them from being on Jesus' side.



We come to our second question: Why *don't* we talk about it?

I think that the first reason is because of a fundamental change in how we understand Jesus. It's a change that happened about 1000 years ago. Up until that time Jesus was widely seen as the great Conqueror. The great Victor over Satan, defeating him and the powers of death and sin and hell on the cross. But in more recent times, the dominating image of Jesus has gone from Conqueror to a moral Teacher, or a moral example. We

often look to him for how we should live and love, rather than cling to him as the mighty Warrior who protects us.³ And both images are fine. They are both good.

But I think this image of Christ as Victorious Conqueror isn't used much these days in part because we're embarrassed about how this image has been misused in the past. Crusades. Wars. These are things we mourn about and rightfully so. Dark pages in the history of our faith. But we shouldn't back away from the idea of Christ as the great Conqueror. But for us to do so we need to remember the Scripture from Ephesians 6 that Wayne read earlier: "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh... [but] against the cosmic powers of this present darkness."⁴ Scripture is talking about an *invisible*, spiritual battle—not a physical one.

A second reason is that we are modern people and we are very sceptical of those passages in Scripture that talk about Satan or the Devil or people being possessed by evil spirits. Jesus is an exorcist in many passages, but we don't read them in church very much. We kind of skip over those parts in our personal devotions. Our modern, sceptical minds wonder, 'Maybe those ancient peoples thought that people were possessed, but didn't they just have some kind of mental illness? Maybe they didn't know how to properly diagnose like we do today. Isn't it possible that that person had multiple personality disorder?' Perhaps. But I think it is wise for us to remember that Jesus is Jesus. If he takes seriously demons and Satan, I think we are naïve if we think we know more about it than he does. Satan is a real thing.

Third: Christians usually make two mistakes about Satan. They either take him too seriously, or they don't take him seriously enough. They either obsess about him thinking that he's lurking everywhere. Or they merely cast him aside as a fairy tale. On either side of the equation I am convinced of this: that one of Satan's biggest accomplishments in modern times is convincing many Christians he's not really there. Many of us have been duped by the best Liar in the world.

And last: Many of us think that because we're already Christians, we're already perfectly protected from him for eternity, as if we have an invisible cloak around us. Well, not quite. In one of the most telling passages of Scripture, the apostle Peter is speaking to elders—that is, leaders in the local church, committed, dedicated Christians—to stand guard. "Discipline yourselves, keep alert," he says, "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour." In other words, despite the fact that you're still serious Christians, and even leaders at that!, stay vigilant because you may be prone to attack. After all, if we weren't vulnerable, why would Scripture tell us to wear armour? Why would we be told to put on the belt of truth and a breastplate and a shield and helmet and take up a sword?

This brings us to the last question: Why *should* we talk about it?



Perhaps up to now things have seemed pretty dark. So I want to emphasize two very key things that I think will bring some light. And these are important.

The first is that God is in control; and that Christ is Lord.

As you read Scripture one of the things you notice is that whenever Satan appears he is *never* more powerful than God or Christ! In the book of Job, Satan appears and can only act against the hero Job when God gives him *permission* to do so. Even when Jesus himself is tempted in the wilderness if you read carefully you'll notice that it says that the Spirit led him out there and that after his temptation, angels came and attended to

him. Why? To further prepare for deeper ministry; for more intense service; for greater ability and faith. God is *always* in control. In other words, when you are on Jesus' side you always have the upper hand. Neil T. Anderson wrote a book called *The Bondage Breaker* to help people grappling with the persistent presence of evil in their own lives. He says it perfectly: "When you encounter the spiritual enemies of your soul, remember: You plus Jesus equals a majority."⁵⁵ You plus Jesus equals a majority!

But it is essential to acknowledge in all of this we are *totally dependent on God*. There's no room for pride. We cling to Christ, always humble, not because we have done all these great things that earn us the privilege—but because God is gracious. *God* saves, not us! Remember, that you plus Jesus equals a majority.

The second thing is so key that it deserves a whole sermon of its own, and you might just get it in a month or two. And the idea is this:

It's not about strength.

It's not a battle of strength between you and Satan. And that's good, because you know what? He's stronger than you and he's stronger than me. He is evil spirit waging war in the cosmic places. He's stronger! But it's not a battle of strength. So, Matthew, if it's not a battle of strength, what's it a battle of? *It's a battle of truth.* That's why in our passage from Ephesians, the first thing we are commended to do when engaged in spiritual warfare is to put on the "belt of truth."

You see, Satan is a coward in the face of truth. He can't stand it. He is "the father of lies." And so he lies. Part of what he does is try to convince you that you don't really belong to God; that you're not good enough; that you're not who you say you are; that you're stupid; that you're weak; that you always have to do everything alone. I've even heard stories of people who are committed Christians questioning their own salvation, dark with fear and trembling with worry. Friends, when you confess with your lips and heart that "Christ is Lord" you are assuring yourself that you a part of his Victory *forever!* No one can take that away from you! No Liar can take that away from you! Satan is the supreme squatter who sometimes resides within us feeding us lies to make us question our salvation.

I remember when I was young. Our family would visit friends at their cottage. My dad and older brother and I would be out of the pick-up truck to greet our friends and their dog would rage out of the house barking and making as if he was on attack. Now my dad and brother knew the drill. They knew that if you were confident and stood firm and didn't react then the dog wouldn't bug you. But I didn't know that yet. When that dog would come ripping out of the house the only one who would run would be me. And guess who he chased? Me! I would run around for a bit and eventually jump into the back of the pickup truck. My dad eventually convinced me that if you stood firm and were confident, the dog wouldn't bug you. So next time we drove up to their place, we all got out of the truck and sure enough that dog came barking and ripping out of the house right toward me. It was as if he had remembered my fear. And I'm pretty sure that the dog had somehow grown bigger since I saw him last. But I stood firm. And when he came toward me I even kicked a stone in his direction. And the dog who was about my size and who could have bit my arm off if he wanted to was exposed. He whimpered around and went back inside.

It's not about strength. It's about being humbly confident in Christ. It's about truth. It's about saying out loud and living those three powerful words that were the fundamental insight of the early followers of Jesus and all through the ages: "Christ is Lord." I was also told recently that when you're in trouble you go to who you

know. And I pray for you fervently that that person is Christ. In trouble you go to who you know: “Christ is Lord.”

You see Satan is a Liar and a squatter. He tries to take what isn't his. Now in all of this he may never bother you. And that would be good; it's not an experience we want. But he might. But if he does please know that *if Christ alone is your Lord there is nothing to fear.*

The Ephesians passage we read gives some further advice. Be “in the Lord and in the strength is *his* power,” it says. That is a corrective to the Liar and his lies. Notice how the strength is the Lord's and not our own. Put on a belt of truth, it says. Which is to say that the truth of Christ matters. Be prepared to speak peace. Not hate or anger or pride or lust. That's to play the other game. Use a shield of faith. And when you think about it a shield is not very good if it is small. You being in worship gives you a bigger shield. You being engaged in acts of compassion gives you a bigger shield. Put on the helmet of salvation, it says, and the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The only active offensive part of the armour is the word of God. But if we are not reading Scripture, and not in worship with other Christians, how can we even use the sword? It just sits there beside us, heavy and intimidating; we can't even pick it up! It's part of the reason we do those things and worship every week. Not to get some kind of spiritual buzz. But to keep the truth in focus. The truth about Christ being Lord; about *who* you are and *whose* you are.

So look very closely, my friends, at your vulnerabilities. And stand firm. Never be afraid, but be ready. There is a phrase that can be helpful to you: *live humbly and boldly in Christ.* Right now you have everything you need to live as a victorious person in Christ every single day.



So I close this morning by greeting you in a new way. By reminding you that the lies are a lie from the Liar. The lies that you are not good enough, and not a real Christian, and not able to pray or read Scripture, that you don't have enough discipline, or that your love is not pure enough, or that you never do as good as you can, or that you never say the right thing, or that you're alone, or that there's something wrong with you, or that you're never gracious, or that your relationship is not perfect enough, or that you never do the right things with your kids, or give the right wisdom to your family, or that you are too normal or too weird, or too perfectionistic, or too proud or too weak or too whatever... to really belong to Christ. That's a lie. So I want to greet you to remind you about the truth about who you *really* are in Christ. I want to greet you with who you really are.

Usually I say ‘Peace be with you’ and you respond by saying ‘And also with you.’ But for these moments I say ‘Victory be with you’ and you are invited to respond ‘And also with you.’ And so I greet you as who you really are despite any lies you may have heard and which seek to rip your loyalty from Christ.

I greet you! To you!—the beloved of Most Holy God; the fathers and mothers and sisters and brothers and children of the apostolic and historic and living faith; the elders and servants and teachers and shepherds and workers in the sacred church of God!... Victory be with you! *All: And also with you!*

To you!—those nurtured in the truth of Jesus Christ; ambassadors of he who bore the cross for us and who invites you to take up your cross behind him and walk; special ones set apart in but not of this world fuelled by the strength of the only Saviour and Messiah, Jesus!... Victory be with you! *All: And also with you!*

To you!—the chosen ones, specially selected by God to be a people of faith and trust; sanctified; redeemed; destined and predestined; those loved by Christ; citizens of the Kingdom of God; members of the house of God and royal priesthood, seated even now before the invisible throne of Lord Almighty; witnesses to the eternal One!... Victory be with you! *All: And also with you!*

To you!—those filled with the Spirit; living, standing, breathing, walking not by sight but by faith; those entering even now into that new creation inaugurated by our Lord; the baptized and saved body of Christ; those who are encircled and encouraged by the promise of the God whose light and strength brilliantly shines like the penetrating rays of 1000 suns!... Victory be with you! *All: And also with you!*

You are in Christ. And he is Lord. And we win.



¹ M. Scott Peck, M.D., *Glimpses of the Devil: A Psychiatrist's Personal Accounts of Possession, Exorcism, and Redemption* (New York: Free Press, 2005), xiii, xv.

² John's Gospel, chapter 8, verse 44.

³ For those interested there is a good book highlighting three of the main atonement theories used of Jesus through the ages. It is a theological book: Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of The Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A.G. Hebert (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1931).

⁴ Ephesians 6: 12.

⁵ Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1990), 60.