

## **OUR SPIRITUAL MUSCLE**

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James 4:7

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

The Bible tells us: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” That statement is particularly relevant to us today and for the following days of the summer. We are in a building program, and the devil doesn’t want anything done for God, so he will put roadblocks in the way to thwart the project and to attempt to bring down anything that will bring glory and honor to Jesus Christ. We are under attack! But the truth is, since the first day you trusted Jesus, admitted the truth about your sinful nature, and made peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, you have been under attack. Satan has tried many times to get you to fall; and some of those times he succeeded. At the same time, you got up, brushed yourself off, and continued to run the ‘race set before you, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of your faith.’ But the devil has not stopped, and today some of you are under his severe anger. If he can, he will bring sickness upon us, bring delays to us, and speak to us through the anger of friends and associates. I say this because some of you have been under more severe attack for a long time. I have been under severe attack for a long time also. We are aware of his pernicious ways.

To illustrate, last year, in Romania, as I preached in the Roma villages, the devil visited me with severe digestive problems, almost to the point of hospitalization. Obviously you and others were praying for me, and as the Lord would have it, my roommate was a doctor, and I was able to receive professional and personal care. I must say, I thought of Paul and Dr. Luke’s services to him. The problem for the devil was that I was preaching the Gospel of a Living Christ who died on the cross and rose again in three days, and many people were being saved by the Gospel. So he was determined to take me out of the game, but by the grace of God, I continued preaching and seeing many souls saved.

Again, the year before that, Martha and I were on our way to Frankfort to get with our group and to caravan up to Cincinnati and catch our plane for Romania. We made it to the 75 turnoff to Lexington before we had a complete blowout on our tire. In very heavy traffic, afraid we would be hit by one of the huge trucks passing by, we had to drive nearly half a mile, and were still partly on the roadway. I got out, opened up my trunk, and the spare tire was also flat. We were stuck and afraid we would be left behind. I tried thumbing and waving at cars, and they thought I was some lunatic, I suppose, and zipped right on by. But finally a Good Samaritan in a pickup truck came by, stopped, and said, “Can I help you.” Then another guy in a pickup truck stopped. They were both construction workers. They pumped up the spare, threw the shredded tire in the back, and we raced down 64 to Frankfort, getting to the church exactly on time. That summer I preached the Gospel in the villages, and in one village alone 2/3rds of a large congregation of adults came forward, fell on their knees and confessed Christ as Savior.

Then there was the time when Martha lost our 2500 dollars that we were to pay our bills with before we left and to use the other in missions. Convinced we should go,

we got our passports and our clothing and left for Frankfort and for Romania. Then, when I got to Cincinnati, I could not find my passport. I had lost it and could not catch the plane. The attendant said that we could come back and catch the next flight that would leave in 2 days for connections to Romania. Driving back I was deeply discouraged, thinking both of the money lost and of the lost passport. Then I thought of the Speedy gas station where I had filled up in Frankfort. I stopped there and asked the clerk if they had found a passport. She said, "We sure have. It's right here."

Then we came to Pippa Passes, and Martha searched through her purse that she had diligently searched through at least ten times before, and found the missing \$2500. We went to Romania, and as it turned out, were sent to the Black Sea area to minister there for the week and a half.

Satan is our enemy. He tries to stop us. But God uses even his own devices to turn against him and get all the glory to His only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Inasmuch as we resist the devil will we develop the spiritual muscle to get through the summer, yea, through our entire lives victoriously.

As the Apostle Peter points out, we are to resist him in the faith. Our faith gives us the necessary resources to resist the devil.

## **I. OUR FAITH TELLS US FIRST OF ALL THAT HE IS REAL AND DANGEROUS.**

**A. HIS REALITY.** The devil is mentioned in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of the Bible, tempting our first parents who, unfortunately sinned and brought the entire race of flesh under the curse of sin. The devil is mentioned in the Book of Job as the great Accuser of men before God. Most obviously, the devil is mentioned in the early ministry of Jesus, trying to alter the course of the Messiah, and tempting Him through Simon Peter, and tempting Him to come down from the cross. In fact, the devil entered the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus to His enemies. Moreover, we can assume that all the resistance of the Scribes, the Sadducees, the Herodians, the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin Court, the scornful, the scoffers, and all others that Jesus encountered in His 3 plus years ministry were 'fiery darts' directed at Him from His adversary the devil. And we see the devil in the lives of the poor people to whom Jesus ministered, for Peter preached that Jesus "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil..." Acts 10:38. The implication of Peter was not just that the devil is real, but that he ruled maliciously in the life of man in the kingdom of this world; and that Jesus' actions were designed to proclaim that another Kingdom had come, the Kingdom of God.

**B. HIS DANGER.** Satan is presented by Scripture as the greatest danger facing the human race. He is the greatest danger facing our church this summer, and throughout the year. He certainly was the greatest danger that Jesus faced. The Temptation tells us that, does it not? Can you read the Gospels and not see the danger that the devil constantly presented to Jesus and to the disciples? And the many dangers Paul faced, were they not brought on by the Devil himself? Why do you think all the Apostles, with the possible exception of John, were martyred? The devil still is the 'prince' of this present evil world, and we are told to 'resist' him. 1 Peter 5:8 reminds us, "Be sober, be vigilant, your adversary the devil goeth around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may

devour.” In verse 9 we are told to “resist him, steadfast in the faith...” Remember, the lion roars before it pounces on its prey to tear that prey to shreds. But if you resist the devil, remaining steadfast in the faith, the devil may roar, but God will stop his mouth as he did the hungry lions Daniel faced. In fact, our faith is so powerful that when the devil opens his mouth like a lion he only meows like a kitten. Jesus has taken away all his power. Heb. 2:14 tells us, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil.”

The devil, however, is dangerous because of his ‘wiles’. Eph. 6:11, “Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” He is crafty and knows just how to tempt us by exploiting our weaknesses, for we are all born with the weakness of the flesh, the weakness of desire, the weakness of pride. The Bible calls this ‘the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.’

He attacks us through our weaknesses also, not just physically, but emotionally. Have you recently been down about the project we have entered? Have you gone to bed with a heavy heart, awakened with a heavy heart, and carried a heavy heart around with you all day long? I have been told not to lift but a certain amount of weight because of my eye operation. The heaviest thing I sometimes carry about is a heavy heart. All the hard physical labor we can do does not diminish our energy nearly so quickly and so completely as carrying around a heavy heart. Satan knows just how to have someone say something that will cause our heart to drop like a lead balloon, doesn’t he? He loves to see us sad, discouraged, anxiety filled, and disappointed. We must learn to control our emotions for Jesus sake.

Satan attacks not just through our lusts, our desires, our pride and our emotions. He also attacks through physical sicknesses. I am convinced that many times Satan arranges a good deal of our illnesses. I’ll leave it at that, for I know that some people think it offensive to give him any credit for making us ill. I still believe my illnesses, like Paul’s, were ‘messengers of Satan to buffet me.’

## **II. OUR FAITH ALSO TELLS US THAT ALL THE SPIRITUAL MUSCLE WE NEED TO DEFEAT SATAN IS AT OUR DISPOSAL.**

**A. WALK IN THE SPIRIT.** We are to Resist Satan. The first rule of physical growth comes from resistance, and the first rule of spiritual growth comes from resistance as well. The Bible never tells us to sit down. We find instead verbs like fight, run, wrestle, and walk. I like this last verb. I can still walk. In the spiritual realm that verb has great relevance: I am to walk in the Spirit. Gal 5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Gal 5:17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these two are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Verse 18 clarifies what Paul is saying, “But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law.” To Walk in the Spirit is to be Led by the Spirit. This simply means that we must allow the Spirit of God to lead us as we walk through the wilderness of this wicked world. Because it is such a dangerous world for believers constantly confronted by the devil; because we have no guidebook to show us the future dangers that await us; because we do not know the trials that may certainly await us in a future that is

dominated by violence and deceit; because of these things we need a Leader, and God has provided that Leader, the Holy Spirit. In John 14 and in John 15, Jesus promised He would not leave us without such a Leader. Therefore, when He returned to the Father's right hand, He sent the Paraclete to be our Companion, Advisor, and Leader. We do not flounder into the darkness alone; He holds our hand and takes us through. "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me!" The Spirit of God knows all of Satan's devices, knows all the dangers before us, knows what is best for us, for our families, and for our church. He is our Leader; we are to follow Him. Walk in the Spirit.

**B. PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD.** Again remember God's Word: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

Let's look at the armor we are to put on! 1. We must have the right assessment of our enemy. According to Ephesians 6:11-13, the devil is tricky, extremely powerful in the world. 2. Next, we must realize that we are in the ring already wrestling with him and his cohorts. We are not bystanders watching the brawl, but soldiers standing waist deep in battle with soldiers falling all around us. Satan wants you to fall in any way you can, by swollen egos, by pernicious habits, by selfish ambitions, by fleshly appetites. When you start winning, he starts promising you the 'kingdom of this world'. He lies! He lies! Do not accept his lies. Keep wrestling, and wrestle to win. 3. We must Stand, and Stand with Truth as that which holds all our armour together. Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" He was so blind that he could not see Truth when he looked Truth in the face. "Jesus said, I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me." John 14:6. The Spirit of God is Truth—He is called the Spirit of Truth in John 14:17. To follow the Spirit is to follow and to know Truth. And, the Word of God is Truth.

Jesus met, matched, and manhandled Satan by using the word of God in the Old Testament. He defeated the defeater by the power of the Word. Truth is our belt, our girdle. 4. Truth is always connected to the Breastplate of Righteousness. We therefore must have first the Righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Since there is 'none righteous, no not one' we must have the righteousness that God promised through His Son Jesus Christ. We can only stand in white garments before the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords if our garments have been made white by the blood of Jesus Christ. Having said that, however, if we are in Christ, we must be Christ-like in our character.

I remind you that in Galatians, when Paul said, 'Walk in the Spirit', he also said that to do so we would have the 'fruits of the spirit,' and these fruits would be thus: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23. Meekness, temperance:" This is the breastplate of righteousness as contrasted with the Works of the Flesh which you can find in verses 19—24, and they are too ugly to read.

5. After Righteousness we are to put on the right kind of Shoes. Our shoes are to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. In a word we are to be ready to tell every man of the hope that is within us. We are God's army waging peace!

6. Then we are to take the shield of faith to quench the fiery darts of Satan. Who do you think has been striking at your heart so often, shooting at your mind time after time, and causing your worry, your anger, your sadness, your disappointment? Those are

simply Satan's fiery darts that can be stopped by the shield of faith. God gives you the option to take it or to leave it lying by your side. I would advise you to have that shield throughout the summer and throughout your life. Lift it high. Protect yourself. Satan shoots with fiery darts.

7. To continue our panoply, we are to take the helmet of salvation. We need to know that we know that we know we have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ when our faith touched His grace. Moreover whatever doubts arise, whatever darts hit their mark, and we still know we are saved. Even when we do stupid things, and sin in stupid ways, we still need that helmet of salvation that covers the knowledge of our eternal salvation.

8. The next part of our uniform for battle is a sword. Now this is not just any sword, it is the sword of the Spirit, and even though in modern warfare the sword is of no use whatsoever, this sword is never outdated, it is the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. This is the first part of the uniform that is an offensive weapon. We can strike that dragon to the heart with the Sword of the Spirit. But we must know, and study, and memorize, and use the word of God if we would defeat the dragon.

9. The next part of the panoply is prayer. Like the Sword of the Spirit, Prayer is an offensive weapon that, when used with the word of God, can strike down kingdoms. When Francis Xavier entered China with the first missionary message, he is said to have uttered the words to the effect, "Oh that a man so weak as I am could come into this great land and destroy the reputation of such a great prince of darkness as that of Satan!" Prayer can accomplish that. Listen to Paul: 6:18,19, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel..."

Dear Church, Pray! Spend extra time in prayer! Fast before the Lord! Some unclean spirits will not be purged from the hearts without prayer and fasting.

We are not arm wrestling! We are in a fight for our spiritual survival, and the spiritual survival of others all around us. When Bunyan's Pilgrim finds himself in deep trouble with the demons and the spirits of darkness, he cries out, "I will stand in the strength of the Lord God!" That is the best place to stand; that is the only place to stand; that is the great shadow of a mighty rock in a weary land.