What Are The Devil’s Schemes?
Ephesians 6:10-20

We’re beginning a new series today entitled, I Have a Question - A series exploring God’s answers. We’ve been asking you all to submit questions you have about a Bible verse or passage, or an issue you want to know what the Bible says about it. We won’t be able to answer all of the questions received during this series, and for those we don’t answer in this series there will be blog posts on the website where we’ll answer those questions and more that come in. SO if you still have a question, please feel free to continue to submit them. This morning we begin with the question, What are the Devil’s Schemes?

Of all the characters in the Bible, it’s the being known as the enemy, or the accuser of the brothers, or the wicked one, that old serpent, the god of this world, the father of all lies, the adversary, the tempter, Beelzebub, the devil, Satan - gets very little press in the Bible.

The Bible is not concerned with making sure we have all the details on the origin of the demonic. In fact, the majority of information in the Bible regarding the devil and the demonic pertains to the demonic’s defeat by God, and how the people of God are to respond and live in light of God’s kingdom have come to the world.

Though there is little information given, we do have some, and I think its important that we look briefly at who the devil and the demonic actually are, so we’re not fooled into thinking that the devil and the demonic are more than they actually are. What we know about the devil and demons is that they are created beings, they were once holy angels like Gabriel who announced Jesus’s birth to Mary, and therefore we know that the devil and the demons were as angelic beings, created to be God’s servants and messengers. We can also make a reasonable inference that sometime before the end of the 6th day of creation, Satan and an unknown number of angels rebelled against God, sinning against God, and were cast out of heaven and God’s presence.

Some believe, and I’m persuaded this way, that Isaiah 14:12-15 is a glimpse into the circumstances surrounding Satan and the other angels’ who rebelled against God in the sin of pride. “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.”

We also know that God and Satan are not equals. God is the uncreated, eternal, omnipotent, that is all powerful; omnipresent, that is God is without spatial constraint being all places at all times; and omniscient, that is all knowing; to name just three of God’s attributes. In contrast, with what little the Bible does say about Satan and demons, we know they are created beings, immortal and not eternal, and limited in their power. The devil and the demons are subject to God’s sovereign power and authority, Satan has to ask for God’s permission to tempt and attack Job - Satan and demons are not omnipotent. Nor are Satan and demons omnipresent - able to be all places in all time all at once - they like all of the other angelic beings are limited to time and space. And Satan and demon is not omniscient - able to know all things past, present, and future as God does.

God and Satan are not the force and the dark side, yin and yang to one another, beings who exist only because the other exists. God existed before the devil and the demons were created, the demonic has
never existed without God. God is Satan’s creator, albeit a sinned against and rebelled against creator, but Satan’s creator none-the-less, and as Satan’s creator the Bible declares emphatically that the devil and demons will be judged by God and subjected to His wrath and eternal torment. “And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

If we don’t first know who the devil is and what the Bible does say already has and will happen to him, it doesn’t really matter if we know what the devil’s schemes are. Satan and the demons are an army in retreat - doing damage and causing destruction on the way down, but vanquished and conquered by the mighty power of Christ. And when we know this, when we believe this when we live our lives in obedience to Christ knowing the truth that the crucified and resurrected Christ has sealed the defeat of the devil - we can know for sure that the provisions given by the Lord Jesus Christ will be sufficient to arm us to fight against Satan’s schemes.

So what are the devil’s schemes? Here’s a quick and not exhaustive list - envy, murder, greed, wickedness, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, insolence, laziness, arrogance, selfishness, pride, disobedience, faithlessness, sexual immorality, ruthlessness, fear, sickness, idolatry, lust, isolation, materialism, disunity, covetousness, doubt, hypocrisy, unforgiveness, and lying - to name just 30. In all of these the devil and demons have a single goal to accomplish regarding the disciple of Jesus Christ - hinder the Christian’s witness and usefulness. Let me say that again, the devil’s goal is not to make me do bad things - for starters the devil can’t make me do anything; tempt, yes - Do, that’s my choice and responsibility. The devil and the demons solitary goal is to hinder a Christian’s witness to men and women who are still lost in their sin, and render them useless for God and His purposes in the Christ’s church and kingdom.

In the end the fundamental issue in discussing the demonic is the glory of God. The New Testament focuses on the devil and demons for only two purposes: to say evil and death are defeated, and to warn us not to be captivated by evil. A close look at the biblical evidence verifies that the Bible cares about the demonic only to make these two points; evil is defeated and we should not be caught by the Devil’s schemes.

What are the devil’s schemes, I’m going to focus for a moment on the devil’s two biggest schemes.

The first is temptation. To be tempted is to be enticed, or lured, or persuaded towards sin. It really goes without saying that this is not only a major scheme the devil uses, it’s perhaps the primary means that the devil uses, since this scheme has morphed into another name for the devil, he is the Tempter. But we need a clear understanding on this scheme. Satan tempts, the devil lures towards sin, but Satan does not make me sin, the devil does not make me do it. Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

Let’s break down what James is saying here, there is temptation. Now the source of the temptation is not given. It’s of course possible that this is a temptation that is coming from the demonic. But, it is also possible that it is a temptation arising out of the wickedness of my own heart. Which is the next step
towards sin - my own evil desire is aroused. And as that is aroused, it begins to germinate a seed of rebellion within my heart

Here’s the point, the devil’s scheme in temptation is to entice, to lure, and to persuade towards sin. And at other times the devil’s scheme is to simply allow me to do the same on my own. What we need to do is be aware of the temptations that grab our hearts fastest, the bring our evil desires to the surface, and instead of nurturing them, resist the lure through the power of the Holy Spirit. James returns to this idea later in his letter and simply says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”. This is not some empty platitude, but the promise of God’s help and provision in the midst of temptation.

The second major scheme the devil uses are falsehoods and lies. The devil is a lying liar who lies. In John 8:44 Jesus says this with total clarity. “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He 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 out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

How often when you look back at the destruction sin brings to your life, you come to realize you were lied to. The pleasures promised didn’t last, the gain sought after didn’t materialize, the pride displayed lead to your fall. We forget that evil, that sin, rarely looks evil or sinful until after it accomplishes its goal; it gains entrance by appearing attractive, desirable, and perfectly legitimate. We’re lied to about the benefits and outcomes, but the lies are nothing more then camouflage and bait for the trap. But we all too often bite, because we’re unaware of the truth that we have in Christ or fearful of the pain or sacrifice that exposing the lie would bring. Again, the prescription is resistance, but a resistance of education - knowing the truth of who I am in Christ and the truth of what it means that God’s kingdom has come.

So what are we to do with the devil’s schemes? We know they’re there, we know the devil uses them to entice, lure, and persuade us toward more sin. So what are we to do? The Bible sums up our response to the Devil’s schemes in three commands, Be strong, Put on the full armor, and take your stand. Satan and the demons are a defeated enemy, much like the Nazi’s on D-Day. There’s still battles to be fought, and our enemy fights with all their might and vigor to render a Christian’s witness for Christ to the world void and their service useless in building God’s kingdom in order to wreak as much damage and pain as possible.

That is Satan and the demons. And this is an important point to remember. Ultimately our enemy is not humanity. Satan and demons are the Christian’s enemy. Humanity needs to hear the gospel and have the lies of the devil exposed. Sharing the gospel with others is a real battle, but we must be clear who the enemy is - the enemy is Satan not humanity.

Disciples of Jesus Christ are not called to pander, cower, or fear the devil, the demons, or their schemes - we are called to be strong in the Lord and his mighty power, to put on the armor God has supplied to us, and stand.

Paul says, be strong in the Lord. In being strong we are not to be strong in ourselves but in the Lord God who gives us strength. To be strong in the Lord means that in standing against the Devil’s schemes we need to know who’s we are. Notice I didn’t say who we are, but who’s we are. Our confidence is not in our selves and our abilities to stand against the Devil and his ways, our confidence is in God and what He alone has accomplished for us in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Be strong in the Lord, know who’s you are.
Second, we are to put on the armor of God. “Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth.” To stand against the devil’s schemes we must first put on the truth that God has revealed in the gospel - we must respond to God’s truth by embracing Jesus Christ as savior of our lives. This is the ultimate truth that God has given, the opening salvo and crushing blow that the devil and the demons have suffered total cataclysmic defeat from. Christians are to put on the belt of the truth of Jesus Christ crucified, and resurrected. And having done that to then stand and live in this truth. Remember, the devil is a liar - Jesus is the truth and we must put Him on in order to stand in truth.

“…put on the breastplate of righteousness.” Having put on the truth of the gospel, we then put on God’s righteousness and reflect his righteous and good character in our life and actions. How we live matters, the choices we make, the actions we take matter because our choices, life, and actions reflect what we truly believe. Put on the righteousness the actions of Christ.

The third part of God’s armor we have been given to put on and stand against the devil’s schemes is in verse 15, “and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.” What Paul is saying is that the Christian is a soldier who is alert and ready. to have our feet fitted with readiness is to have our boots and we are ready to move. We are alert to our surroundings, aware of what is going on. In other words, there was a time when you did not know what God’s peace was, what the gospel was. But, now that you know, now that you have received and experienced the peace of the gospel, live ready and alert to your enemy - because the devil is a liar, and live aware of your surroundings ready to share the gospel of God’s peace with others.

The fourth piece of armor we are to take up is the shield of faith. Verse 16, “In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one”. The faith we are to take up in this shield is not the faith that you and I exercise in God, but rather God’s faithfulness to protect those who are his own. the protection afforded to believers from this shield comes from God’s promises to protect, watch over, and stand up for those who He calls his own.

The final two pieces of the armor with which the Christian is to clothe themselves with are received from God as gifts of his own power, might, mercy, and grace. Verse 17, “…and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”. To take the helmet of salvation is to receive salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

We are to also take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God and apply it specifically to the schemes we find the devil using against us. Paul saying that this is the word of God is not speaking to a general or cursory knowledge of scripture, but is emphasizing the precision that comes by knowledge and understanding of specific truths. Just like Jesus did in the wilderness when Satan came to tempt Him, we need to use specific scriptural truths to counter specific satanic falsehoods.

Finally, being strong in the Lord – knowing who’s you are, having put on the FULL armor of God, we are to stand – trusting not in ourselves and our talents, and our abilities, but to stand trusting in all the resources God has provided to us, coming to the Lord in prayer. Verse 18, “...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”
The devil is a crafty but defeated enemy before God’s people. The devil and the demons will seek to beguile, destroy, tempt, lie, and use any scheme necessary to hinder a Christian witness and usefulness for God. But we are not unwise to the devil’s schemes nor are we unequipped. Therefore, if as believers in Jesus Christ we want to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power, if we want to stand against the devil’s schemes, then we must continually put on the armor of God which God himself has supplied in Jesus Christ.