How many of you here believe in the devil? I would hope that every one of you believes that a person known as the devil or Satan or Lucifer really exists. I would expect that each of you would confess that the devil is a thinking being, someone who is able to make and carry out his plans and schemes.

We take that for granted among ourselves. But how many of us have family members and acquaintances who do not? While I think most people acknowledge there to be a force of evil in this life, I am not as sure that those same people accept the reality of the devil. In fact, I would guess more people do not believe in the devil than those who do.

There are many reasons for that. Although most people recognize the presence of evil in this world, they are not willing to assign responsibility for it all on one being who has never been seen, photographed, or interviewed. Those who deny God or have difficulty accepting the supernatural, tend to play down the existence of the devil as well.

Many people prefer not to think about him at all because the idea that such a being exists is much too frightening to consider. Some assume that the devil has not, is not, and will not ever have any influence in their lives, so he cannot be real. While still others assume that if there is a devil, then there is a God. And if there is a God, and if he has any goodness at all, then he will shield them from the devil.

You can tell a lot about the way people think about the devil by the way they attempt to protect selves against him. If you think he does not exist and has very little presence in your life, then you take minimal precautions, if any. If you really respect his ability to deprive you of your place in heaven, you will protect yourself in every way possible.

The Apostle Paul definitely falls into that second category of thinking. He had a healthy fear of the devil. And he plainly wants you to feel the same way. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this is how he describes the devil and his characteristics: He is not flesh and blood. He is one of rulers, authorities, rulers of this darkness. He is the head of the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. In other words, he is a very nasty fellow! He is someone we have to deal with, and that is not going to be an easy task!

Other places in Scripture tell us that the devil was created by God as a holy angel! Like human beings, the angels were also given free will, the ability to choose a life of loving service to their Lord or a life of sinful rebellion against him. The devil and many other angels chose to rebel and were sent to hell. Unlike mankind, they have no hope of salvation.

This angered the devil and he devoted all his abilities to our damnation. He wants to destroy us. and, as Paul says, he is not like us, he is not flesh and blood, living an earthly life. He is a spirit, living in the spiritual realms. Ordinary rules cannot be applied to him. He never tires, he never runs out of energy or needs a rest. He is always at his strongest to tempt us, no matter how long or how hard he has worked on us.

Since the devil is a fallen angel, he has powers that exceed ours. Because he has been around from the beginning, he has seen it all - every type of human being, every temptation known to exist. He has studied you from birth, so he knows your strengths and weaknesses. He knows which temptations work on you and which do not. He knows the Bible better than you ever will and loves to twist its meaning to deceive you.

On top of all that, he is 100% evil. He is the Lord’s greatest enemy, completely opposed to everything the Lord wants. That means there is not a trace of good in him. He will never
feel any pity for you. He will not let up because you are worn out. He will not hold back because it would not be fair to hurt when you cannot defend yourself. His goal is to do whatever it takes to push you into hell.

This is our enemy. This is what you are up against. He is so ferocious, Paul says, that you can only be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. So dangerous is he to your eternal life with God, that you must put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. We are in a struggle for our lives!

So, again, Paul plead with us to Take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand. Without this armor, you are a goner - you do not have a prayer. The devil will snatch you from the company of saints and consign you to an eternity of misery with him in the bowels of hell.

This armor, therefore, is very valuable to us! It is the difference between life and death. Let’s examine it more closely. We begin with the belt of truth buckled around your waist. Here we should not think of a narrow strip of material that keeps our pants up. Instead, we should think about a thick and wide band of leather, like weight lifters use. This belt is meant to support our back and our ability to stand straight.

Our spiritual belt is the truth - the truth about us, the truth about God, the truth about our relationship with the Lord. The truth is that we are sinners who richly deserve to be damned. But the truth is also that the Lord loves us - loves us enough to send his one and only Son to be our Savior from sin, death, and hell.

It is this truth that supports us against the devil’s lies that we are too sinful, too unworthy to be saved; or that we can do something to earn our salvation; or that we must live good lives to validate his love for us. All the devil’s lies crumble before that truth and we are freed from his deceptions!

Next Paul speaks about the breastplate of righteousness. Just as a bullet-proof vest protects the vital areas of a soldier’s body, so the breastplate of righteousness protects our very life. Without the righteousness won for us by Christ Jesus, the devil has a legitimate claim to our heart and soul. We should belong to him, for we are sinners, and the soul that sins will surely die. Only the breastplate of righteousness keeps us alive.

Next, Paul says to stand with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. Good shoes, substantial boots, are necessary in war to provide firm footing so that you can readily go where you need to go. We must fight a pitched battle with the devil. It can be no other way. The gospel renders a peace that surpasses all human understanding and the devil’s reach.

The gospel of peace tells us that It is finished! The victory over the devil has already been won for us. And the gospel assures us that Jesus’ victory can be repeated in us. We can enter the battle confident that we will win. No matter hard the struggle may be, the outcome is never in doubt. The devil will be ultimately defeated and heaven is ours. And that brings us peace and a readiness to enter the battle zone.

In addition to all this, hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. The devil is likely to attack you with temptations that come from every direction. One day, it may be to question the love of God. The next day, it may be to reject his commands because you enjoy a particular sin. The day after that, it may be to doubt that Jesus is the only way to the Father. The temptations can come from anywhere. The shield of faith, however, can be placed between you and the temptations and protect you. Faith will never let you down.

Next, take the helmet of salvation. The helmet protects your head, your mind. Live in the certainty of your salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, and no false motions about any
other way of salvation can enter your thoughts. Disengage your train of thought, your logical way of thinking, and simply believe what the Lord says is true. Nothing the devil might propose can then distract you from that conviction!

Finally, we get to the last piece of God’s armor - the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. This final weapon is the only offensive weapon we are given and the only one we need! With the Word of God as our sword, we can chop to pieces any temptation the devil uses to attack us.

We can do as Jesus did in the wilderness when he was tempted by the devil for 40 days. Every time the devil confronts us with a choice to sin or a lie or a half-truth or something that appeals to our flesh despite God’s command - any temptation at all - we can answer Thus says the Lord!

And just as the devil had to flee from Jesus, so he will have to retreat from us. He cannot stand against God or his Word or anybody who uses the Word of God. That sharp sword is able to utterly destroy him. It is a weapon we need to keep sharp by constant study of God’s Word. It is a weapon we must use often to maintain our skill in handling it effectively.

And after you’ve put on that full armor of God, Paul advises, Pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray for yourself boldly, confident that the Lord will supply anything you still lack. Pray for the success of your fellow believers, knowing that in the Lord, we all stand firm! Amen.

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