



Alert, Not Alarmed

The best way to keep the enemy out is to keep Christ in

Human nature tends to excesses by a kind of evil magnetic attraction. We instinctively run to one of two extremes, and that is why we are so often in error.

A proof of this propensity to extremes is seen in the attitude of the average Christian toward the devil. I have observed among spiritual persons a tendency either to ignore him altogether or to make too much of him. Both are wrong.

There is in the world an enemy whom we dare not ignore. We see him first in Genesis 3 and last in Revelation 20; which is to say that he was present at the beginning of human history and will be there at its earthly close.

This enemy is not a creation of religious fancy, not a mere personification of evil for convenience, but a being as real as man himself. The Bible attributes to him qualities of personality too detailed to be figurative, and reveals him speaking and acting in situations hard and practical and far removed from the poetic imagination.

The devil is declared in the Scriptures to be an enemy of God and of all good men. He is said to be a liar, a deceiver and a murderer who achieves his ends by guile and trickery. Because he is a spirit he is able to "walk up and down in the earth" at his pleasure. While he is not omnipresent (omnipresence being an attribute of God alone) he is ubiquitous, which for his purpose amounts to the same thing.

The enemy bears many names, among them being the dragon, the serpent, the devil and Satan. In addition to this one supreme evil being there are demons, "principalities", "powers", "rulers of the darkness of this world" and "wicked spirits in high places" which operate under his direction. How successful this band of cosmic outlaws has been is written into human history with a pen dipped in blood. The havoc they have wrought in the earth is so frightful as to exceed all power of description. Every newspaper, every news broadcast is a proof of the existence of that evil genius called the devil and his band of vicious spirits dedicated to destruction.

Satan hates God for His own sake, and everything that is dear to God he hates for the very reason that God loves it. Because man was made in God's image the hatred with which Satan regards him is particularly malevolent, and since the Christian is doubly dear to God he is hated by the powers of darkness with an aggravated fury probably not equalled anywhere else in the moral universe.

In view of this it cannot be less than folly for us Christians to disregard the reality and presence of the enemy. To live in a world under siege is to live in constant peril; to live there and be wholly unaware of the peril is to increase it a hundredfold and to turn the world into a paradise for fools.

While we must not underestimate the strength of the foe, we must at the same time be careful not to fall under his evil spell and live in constant fear of him. "We are not ignorant of his devices." If he cannot make skeptics of us he will make us devil-conscious and thus throw a permanent shadow across our lives. There is but a hairline between truth and superstition. We should learn the truth about the enemy, but we must stand bravely against every superstitious notion he would introduce about himself. The truth will set us free but superstition will enslave.

I know Christians so engrossed with the fight against evil spirits that they are in a state of constant turmoil. Their touching effort to hold the devil at bay exhausts them nervously and physically, and

they manage to stay alive only by frantically calling on God and rebuking the devil in the name of Christ. These are innocent spiritists in reverse and are devil-conscious to a point of being borderline neurotics. They grow sensitive and suspicious and always manage to locate an evil spirit as the cause back of everything that irritates them; then their hackles stand straight up and they begin to order the devil about in a loud voice, but their nervous gestures tell how deeply frightened they are.

The bad thing about all this is that it is contagious and will soon turn a joyous, worshipful congregation into a crowd of scared and jumpy persons, nervous and completely unhappy.

The scriptural way to see things is to set the Lord always before us, put Christ in the centre of our vision, and if Satan is lurking around he will appear on the margin only and be seen as but a shadow on the edge of the brightness. It is always wrong to reverse this — to set Satan in the focus of our vision and push God out to the margin. Nothing but tragedy can come of such inversion.

The best way to keep the enemy out is to keep Christ in. The sheep need not be terrified by the wolf; they have but to stay close to the shepherd. It is not the praying sheep Satan fears but the presence of the shepherd.

The instructed Christian whose faculties have been developed by the Word and the Spirit will not fear the devil. When necessary he will stand against the powers of darkness and overcome them by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony. He will recognise the peril in which he lives and will know what to do about it, but he will practise the presence of God and never allow himself to become devil-conscious.

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