

Stomp the Devil Romans 16:17-21, Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

A few minutes before the services started, the church people were sitting in their pews and talking. Suddenly, Satan appeared at the front of the church. Everyone started screaming and running for the front entrance, trampling each other in a frantic effort to get away from the evil one. Soon everyone had exited the church except for one elderly gentleman who sat calmly in his pew without moving, unconcerned to the fact that the devil was in his presence. So Satan walked up to the old man and said, "Don't you know who I am?" The man replied, "Yep, your Satan." "Aren't you afraid of me?" Satan asked. "No, sure ain't" said the man. "Don't you realize what I can do to you?" asked Satan. "I know what you can do to me," replied the old man. "And you're still not afraid?" asked Satan. "Nope." A little perturbed, Satan asked, "Well, why aren't you afraid of me?" The man calmly replied, "Well, I've been married to your sister for over 48 years."

I suspect that before this became merely a snide remark that it was a very real superstition to *SPEAK OF THE DEVIL ... AND HE SHOWS UP*. But today we are going to speak Satan's name because he has long haunted church halls – in fact this is one of his most strategic battlefields! – so that when he does show up we can mark and avoid him and his minions and thus through the power of God **Stomp the Devil**.

Come on pastor, you don't really believe in a real Devil do you? Yes I do, not only because the Bible teaches extensively about such a fallen angel, but also his existence is the only way I can explain so much of the focused and unfocused evil that happens in our world today, from the holocaust, to suicide bomber families blowing themselves up in Christian churches, to teenagers targeting their classmates as a homicidal Spring fling.

In fact one of our biggest modern-minded blind sides to the cause of such daily evil that occurs around us is that we are essentially atheists towards and thus quite ignorant of the activity of the spiritual world and the very real presence of evil incarnate; being thus blindered we are all the more easily defeated by the Devil and his followers, because as Paul wrote to the Ephesus Church:

For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh,
but against ... spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
Therefore take up the whole armor of God,
so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day.
Ephesians 6:12-13

Realize that this is one way we Christians should be "transformed" in our thinking about this world. We know the spiritual world is a real place – all our present defenses and

future hopes are pegged there – and if we are eventually proven wrong, then we are no worse off for the error than every other animal who has died before us.

That is why this thought should frame all our daily activities:

We are not physical beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a physical experience.

God has designed us for eternity and this life is merely our preparation for the next ...

We are not physical beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a physical experience. God has designed us for eternity and this life is merely our preparation for the next a much bigger, much more real world to come in which we will live either in fellowship with God, or imprisoned with the Devil.

Similarly, ours is not merely a physical world inhabited by spirits, but a spiritually saturated universe wrapped in temporary a physical shell. As the Bible teaches, all that we can see is temporary it is that which is unseen which is God's eternal universe that forms our permanent reality (c.f. Psalm 90, Hebrews 11:1-3, 10-13).

So it is time we woke up to both sides of the spiritual battle raging around us here on earth – where unseen struggles often influence our daily life – and decide which side we are standing with.

But if this is our true reality, why, up until now through our extensive study in the book of Romans, has Paul only once, indirectly mentioned the devil ? (in Romans 8:38 where he said that neither "angels or demons" can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord)

Paul does write more about the devil in his other letters but in Romans, his greatest letter on God's salvation and our response to God, this concluding remark on identifying and avoid Satan's servants is the only thing we need. He is a powerful but defeated enemy who can only harm us when we are blind to his strategies. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis' caution, *we can make two mistakes with regard to the devil that is in thinking too much or too little about him.* **So we need learn just this one simple bit of wisdom so that God can use us to stomp the devil.**

I want you to be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil.

The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet.

(16:19-20)

So let's turn to our Roman's text to learn how to stomp the devil!

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to **keep an eye on those who cause dissensions** and **offenses**, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; **avoid them**.

Romans 16:17

Paul only uses this word "urge" three times in his letter to the Romans. "Urge" is a powerful word that can also be translated as *I appeal to you* or *I beg of you*. So what three things would Paul strongly urge us to do?

To present your life as a transformed sacrifice to God (12:1-2)

To pray that Paul would be protected from trouble in Jerusalem (15:30).

To **watch for and avoid those who cause dissension** (16:17)

Notice that the word "**dissension**" means to cause division within a group. And the word translated here as "**offenses**" is the same word that Paul used early for being a "stumbling block."

Let us no longer pass judgment on one another, instead resolve never to put a **stumbling block** or hindrance in the way of another.

Romans 14:13

Here's the point. Divisions and stumbling blocks, these are things that happen within the Christian family and are being caused by people claiming to be Christian. So Paul is not writing about mere immature Christian bickering but actual demonic activity in the church, midst of the body of Christ.

For **such people do not serve our Lord Christ**, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.
(16:18)

So the ones Paul is urging us to **to keep an eye on and avoid** are those people who are doing the devil's work **within the church**.

People who are "only serving themselves not Christ!" And if they are only serving themselves, then we know who their true master is.

By now you should be very concerned and rightly be asking how did the devil's workers get inside the church?

The answer is that they have always been present, having infiltrated the "church militant" from the very start. Let me explain two terms you may have heard but never understood before. The **church militant** defines the physical version of the Christian church here on earth. It includes all people who claim to be believers in Jesus Christ, from the most dedicated saints, to the merely cultural Christian ("sure I'm a Christian, I'm an American ain't I!"), to the intentional infiltrators planted here by the enemy.

As he explained in his parable of the "weeds among the wheat," Jesus warned his followers from the very start that the devil would be following along right behind him sowing fakes in his field (Matthew 13:24-30).

the slaves of the householder said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" He replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. (13:27-30)

The Church militant has always been a very weedy field, which continues to be a big part of its struggle to demonstrate God's kingdom here on Earth. Thankfully, there are no "weeds" in the **Church Triumphant**, which is comprised of *all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light, that multitude no one can number, with whom, in this Lord Jesus, we evermore are one*. When we meet Jesus face-to-face, then we transfer our membership to the Church triumphant, that *great cloud of witnesses* who cheer on their brothers and sisters down here still running the race, striving towards the goal of knowing Jesus.

But how should Christians respond to the weeds that the enemy has sown? we are to treat everyone like they are "wheat" and let the reapers do the separation. But at the same time we are not to be blind to those doing the devil's work in the church; because you are their primary target. What the devil wants to accomplish through them it to tear down what God has built in you. Paul writes:

*I urge you, brothers and sisters, to **keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses**, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; **avoid them**. For such people do not serve our Lord Christ (16:17-18).*

And how can we discern the difference between a mature Christian, simply an immature Christian, or an outright fake? Jesus answered that question as well:

'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits... A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit... **Thus you will know them by their fruit.** (Matthew 7:15-20)

It is one thing to be a young, inconsistent Christian, tossed by the waves of life, misled by a fad doctrine or cunning teacher, but eventually repentant and growing. It is another to be one who consistently causes dissension within the body of Christ causing other Christians to stumble in their faith. *By their fruit you will know them.* As Romans has already taught us, do not judge but instead strive to build up the stumbling Christian; but keep an eye on and avoid the latter.

What then is the intention of these self-serving false Christians?

For such people ... serve their own appetites, and **by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded** (16:17)

First, they are dishonest with others and even with themselves (vs. 18) "I'm doing this for God" but in reality they are doing it for themselves. Two patterns to watch out for and most of the time they don't even realize they are doing this:

1. A pattern of disobedience, hostility, and defiant behavior toward authority figures (c.f. Jude 1:8)
2. An unhealthy preoccupation with themselves and their own "better idea." People become things to be used on their all consuming hunt for power, money, or indulging their flesh. I will not speak against any person currently presenting themselves as a "Christian leader," that is for you to discern; but since both Jim Baker and Jimmy Swaggert confessed to their self-serving lifestyle, I am sure they both would agree that this had been their driving motive in life.

Second, They are deceptive.

How are they deceptive? By deviating from the Word of God! They endorse or teach doctrines that resemble what one finds in the Bible. But there are subtle differences. Differences that make all the difference! The Message paraphrase translates this verse: "*These people take bits and pieces of the teaching that you learned and then use them to make trouble*" (c.f. 2 Peter 3:16).

These things they say and do attract a following among the gullible and before long, there is a division in the church. The devil loves nothing better! He loves to introduce something into the life of the church that will divide the flock, divide and conquer

They use speech that sounds good and beneficial, speech that creates the illusion of truth based on its form, regardless of its content. Many a lie is hidden behind eloquence and personal charisma. **We must never accept teaching as true just because of the packaging it comes in.** We must discipline ourselves to remember that form and style are secondary to content. We must grow up in our faith, and knowledge of God's word so we can discern when someone begins to make a counterfeit version. Just like bank tellers, who carefully study real money so that they can recognize a counterfeit bill when it appears, so the people of God should be so familiar with the real thing so that when a counterfeit appears, we can recognize it and expose it for what it is.

How should we respond to those who appear to be peddling bad fruit? Two things:

1. Watch out - in other words do not be caught unaware. When our dogs see something or someone outside the house, they become agitated. They will run to the window barking at whoever dares to shadow our distant sidewalk. They want to examine them, protect their territory from those who might try and take it away, keep an eye on them until they prove friendly;
2. Keep away from them. Avoid them, turn away from them. Because these people are not just passing idle conversation or friendly gossip (is any gossip friendly?), there's almost always a motive behind what is being said or done.

"Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly."
2 Timothy 2:16, NIV.

Now let's be clear, we should never fear questions, never rebuke someone who is trying to make us aware of a real problems; we need these people, honest critics, brave prophets. But we must also be able to discern difference between honest concerns and just trying to cause division – by their fruit you will know them.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, how do we insure that we are among the real flock, and not wolves in sheep's clothing?

Paul gives us these three simple disciplines to follow the rest of our life.

while your **obedience** is known to all...
I want you to **be wise in what is good**
and **guileless in what is evil.**
(16:19)

1. Be committed to God's Word. "obedience!" Our lives should be marked by a knowledge of and deep commitment to following the Word of God – no matter what direction the neighbors are headed in.

There should be a commitment to: Listen to it as it is taught and preached, but more importantly Learn it (20 to 30 minutes on Sunday morning isn't going to cut it!). Scientists tell us that people only retain about 10% of what they hear.

Study to show yourself approved unto God,
a workman that needs not to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the word of truth.
(2 Timothy 2:15 KJV)

And then Live in, through and definitely out God's word:

But be doers of the word,
and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.
James 1:22

With these disciplines it will be hard for the imposters to fool us.

while your **obedience** is known to all...
I want you to **be wise in what is good**
and **guileless in what is evil.**
(16:19)

2.. Be wise about what is good- in other words we need to be skilled in godly living. How can we be skilled? Practice!

Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.
Philippians 4:9,10

3. Be **guileless** ("Innocent") about what is evil- in other words be childlike toward guilty ways. Paul is using a bit of word-play here, because this is the same word he used earlier to describe "simple-minded" people. In other words we should school our selves in the ways of God and be intentionally ignorant off refusing to practice or even dabble in what these day's they are calling "the dark side of the force." Which to my way of thinking includes, Ouija boards, tarot cards, fortune tellers and yes even the astrology page in the newspaper.

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good.
Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.
3 John 1:11

We do not have to be experienced in sin to be against sin! We do not have to drink poison to know that it will kill us! We don't have to play with a rattlesnake to know that it will bite us.

May the Lord help us to walk holy and so close to Him that sin seems as foreign as an Eskimo in the Mojave Desert. In a sanctified state, we can know what is not of God and spot those who are trying to lead us down a bad path and those who are trying to cause trouble!

Now let's close with how God can thus use your feet to stomp the devil.

be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil.
The **God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet.**
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
(16:19-20)

Paul is intentionally referring to God's promise, made long ago to Satan in the Garden of Eden, that one day the "seed of the woman would crush his head" – deal him a death blow. Which is exactly what Jesus did on Calvary. Carrying our sins to the cross and leaving them there, he wrenched God's kingdom back from Satan's grasp and restored to us the privilege of once again living as children of God.

And now as we continue to live our lives as transformed people, people who are holy and acceptable to God, then every step we take through life continues to crush down on Satan's head. Through no ability of our own but the power of God's Spirit living in us, we continue God's work of defeating the devil and getting God's will done on earth as it is in heaven.

When the 70 disciples returned to Jesus, rejoicing that even the demons obeyed their Gospel commands, Jesus remarked that he saw "Lucifer fall from heaven like a strike of lightning." I don't think he really saw such happen while they were gone, but rather that he was speaking metaphorically. For as they were faithfully walking through the world sharing God's love and the Gospel, they were helping to stomp the devil down.

That why Jesus warned them not to gloat over fallen demons – "that way leads to the dark side of the force," but rejoice that their names were written in Heaven, because that is what it all comes down to. Amen?