

“Who is the REAL Enemy?”

Healing the Racial Divide – Study #2

Introduction

The most dangerous enemy is the one that lives among you and goes about his destructive work undetected. “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Satan works tirelessly to escalate and intensify racial tensions. Thanks be to God that His Word empowers us to defend ourselves against and counter Satan's divisive attacks!

Simple Answers to Difficult Questions

Does it ever seem to you that the solution to healing racial divisions is really simple? Would it all disappear if we just spent more time in authentic, vulnerable, and transparent conversations? If we just view one another as equal, won't that solve all our problems? As we continue our discussion about racial tension in America, it is fitting for us to address the heart of the conflict. Who is stirring up all the hostility, the distrust, and resentment? Who is the real enemy that we are fighting? Is the person with a different skin color our enemy?

1. If you have been paying attention, you can't help but notice that our country appears to be sitting on a powder keg of racial tension. Based on your observations, what do you suspect is causing the racial division in America?
2. Who or what do you hear getting the blame for this racial tension?

In the midst of racial unrest, it is easy to see “the other side” as the enemy. Poor communication and closed-mindedness are definitely contributing to the problem, but deep down something much bigger is at work. A dark force is working behind the scenes, stirring up all our suspicions and doubts. If this were merely a human issue, it would be difficult enough to solve. But this is an enemy no one wants to talk about. In fact, many don't even acknowledge his existence. He operates in stealth mode and lurks in the darkness. He is known as Satan or the devil, and his involvement makes closing the racial divide humanly impossible.

The devil's goal in dividing mankind is to thwart God's plan for His Church to share the Gospel with all people. He strives to make Christians fearful to speak the truth in love. He wants white Christians to be condescending, suspicious, and disrespectful toward blacks who think differently regarding these problems. He stirs black Americans to question and be skeptical of the sincerity of white Christians who do not fully grasp the difficulties that can arise for a black person living in America.

Genesis 3:1-6 and Job 1:6-12

Genesis 3:1-6 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (2) And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, (3) but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” (4) But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. (5) For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (6) So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Job 1:6-12 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. (7) The LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” (8) And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” (9) Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason? (10) Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. (11) But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” (12) And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

The Book of Job opens with God and Satan having a conversation. When God mentions Job's integrity and faith, Satan slanders Job, claiming the only reason Job is righteous is because God has blessed him with abundant possessions and protected him from all loss and misfortune. He challenges God to let him take away all of Job's things, then surely Job will curse God to His face. The second half of Job Chapter 1 catalogs all the losses God permitted Job to face.

3. As we look at these two Biblical accounts in Genesis and Job, what do you notice about the way Satan operates?
4. What temptation did Satan offer Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?
5. Satan argued that Job was faithful only because God was protecting him; did Job pass the test? If Satan posed the questions to us, what would be our answer? Was God right, or was Satan right?
6. Does Satan still have that access to accuse Christians directly to God?

Be Aware of the Nature of Our Enemy

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So, it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

Satan is crafty; he will pull out all the stops to trip you up! Peter describes him like a hunter, disguising himself to capture his prey: "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). What a perfect picture of the devil! Luther writes in the Large Catechism: "the devil chafes and rages as a fierce enemy with all his power and might."

Some Cultural Context

When we take a step back from the emotional ties we have to this issue of race, we can finally ask the right question – the question that nobody has been asking. **Who benefits most from this racial problem getting ramped up and intensifying?** America isn't winning. The communities under attack are not winning. The police on edge—their every decision facing scrutiny—are not winning. Many white Americans and African Americans want to help solve the problem, but they fear if they speak out it will make the situation worse.

So, even though each of these groups is searching for a path forward, we are lost amid this tension. Maybe, just maybe, there is a spiritual reason behind all this. As we read earlier from Scripture, we have been duped. Satan is attempting to trick us into compliance, trying to get us to buy into the narrative that this is just the way life is, hopeless. Things will never get any better. The racial divide is just too big. Maybe Jesus can straighten it all out when He returns, but there's nothing we can do now.

Satan has been whispering in all our ears, "There is nothing to see here. Go about the business of living your life. Ignore the poor; the government will handle that problem. Why keep talking about things that happened hundreds of years ago—people should just move on. Besides, you have enough worries of your own to deal with. Do you have time to concern yourself with the weakness of others?"

As the divide grew, white America was ignorant of festering problems and frustrations in a black America that felt trapped and hopeless. There are deep-seated hurts in the African American community that affect the very fabric of America. The frustration boils over into violence and rioting when one event like a shooting by a white officer lights the already volatile powder keg of racial tension, and both sides retreat to their corners, ready to come out fighting. White America is left feeling frustrated, powerless, and overwhelmed by the enormity of the task to fix the problem. And that is the very trick Satan played on us. He wants us feeling hopeless, looking for the wrong enemy. It is not my brother or sister of another skin color or race – there is only ONE race: the human race! Satan, the father of lies, is the one feeding this tension. He is the real enemy. He is the one driving a deeper wedge between people. But God does not leave us at Satan's mercy. Notice the advice the apostle Paul gives us about this warfare:

Ephesians 6:10-17 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. (11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (12) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (13) Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. (14) Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, (15) and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. (16) In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; (17) and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*

Paul ends his Letter to the Ephesians with a call to stand against Satan's attacks. The Christians in Ephesus have a new relationship with one another since they now belong to Christ through faith. This new life in Christ leads to a new understanding and attitude toward Satan. As we have discussed earlier, Satan is a devious, wicked, and ruthless enemy. Paul is making this new community of believers aware that there is a spiritual war going on. Satan's kingdom wages war against God's people.

Jesus was an obvious target for Satan. If the evil one could cause Him to fall, the battle would be won. So Jesus spent forty days and nights in the wilderness, standing against the devil's torrent of temptations. Satan tempted Jesus to prove His identity and misuse His power, all for the lure of personal gain. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He was confronted by evil spirits and by power-hungry, hypocritical, and misguided religious leaders. Finally, on the cross, Satan seemed to have the upper hand, as Jesus suffered and died.

7. How can we Christians possibly survive against the onslaught of such a powerful foe.

8. How has Satan been active in the racial issues facing us as a nation?

Our Equipment in This Fight

Like it or not, we are all subject to attack from the forces of evil. So we would do well to look at the equipment God gives us for the battle. It has been said that a soldier is no better than his gear. Paul has taught us about our enemy and reminded us that our strength to stand and resist that enemy comes from the Lord. Now, he directs our attention to the equipment that our Lord provides. The image that Paul uses here would have been familiar to every person in the Ephesian Church. Paul is describing the armor of the typical Roman soldier. His words reflect a messianic passage from Isaiah 59:17, regarding Jesus' earthly battle with Satan: "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped Himself in zeal as a cloak." The apostle Paul may have had this same passage in mind when he described the armor that God gives believers to equip them for the onslaught of evil.

The Belt of Truth – This belt played a more important role than just keeping the soldier's pants on. It encircled his waist and stabilized his body. The belt protected his mid-section and provided a place to restrain his garments so they would not hinder his movements in the heat of battle. In the same way, the truth of God's Word guards us and keeps us nimble. Jesus talked about the importance of knowing the truth: "If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). Since Jesus called Satan the "father of lies," it is imperative that Christians be armed with truth to defend against those lies. The truth of God's Word stabilizes us, protects us, and prevents us from being tripped up in the spiritual battles of life.

The Breastplate of Righteousness – The Roman breastplate was made of leather. This body armor protected the vital and most vulnerable areas of the body, specifically, the heart. God has declared us righteous through faith in Jesus as our Savior: "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ's righteousness became ours through Baptism. It guards our hearts and protects us from Satan's slings and arrows.

The Shoes of the Gospel – The blood shed on ancient battlefields made the ground slippery and treacherous. Roman soldiers wore sandals with iron nails protruding beneath (like cleats) to provide traction and a solid foundation on the battlefield. The Gospel gives Christians a firm grounding in the things of God and makes us ready for every opportunity the Lord provides. Regular worship, Bible study, and personal devotions give us a firm grasp on the fundamentals of our faith—not just what we believe, but also why we believe it. That gives us a solid foundation when the battle comes to us.

The Shield of Faith – Paul is not describing the cute little round shields you see in the movies. This is the large, rectangular shield that protected a soldier from the enemy's fiery darts. Roman soldiers commonly soaked these leather shields in water before battle, making the shields more efficient in quenching the flaming arrows of the enemy. As we Christians go into battle with Satan, Holy Spirit-given faith is our shield. Soaked in the power of God's Word and Sacraments, it quenches all the fiery darts of the evil one. Faith allows us Christians to stand firm in the battle and hold our ground regardless of the odds. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation" (Hebrews 11:1-2).

The Helmet of Salvation – The helmet protected the soldier's brain. No matter how well the rest of him was protected, a blow to the brain could be fatal or severely injure the soldier. Paul calls the hope of salvation our helmet. Satan would drive us to hopelessness and despair, but our salvation is secured by Jesus' death on the cross and His powerful resurrection on the third day. You received this salvation through Baptism and the Gospel. We can confidently stand against Satan's attacks armed with the blessed assurance of that salvation. "But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

The Sword of the Spirit – All the other equipment we have seen is defensive. The sword served both purposes—defensively blocking the attack of the enemy, and then swinging out to attack. The Holy Spirit gives the sword its effectiveness, its "cutting edge," since He inspired it in His holy writers. After all, what did Jesus do when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness? When Satan struck with his temptations, Jesus countered with nothing but the Word of God: "It is written." He used it both defensively to ward off Satan's blows and offensively to push him back. The Holy Spirit is at work in the Word, making it powerful. We need only speak God's Word to fend off Satan's attack.

So, What Does This Mean?

In the days and weeks ahead, ask God to open your eyes to Satan's deception and slander that you may have come to believe about people of different skin colors and ethnicities. Ask God to break through the false belief that rules in other peoples' minds. Also, take some time to analyze your own worldview. If you have a strong internal reaction to something said by someone of a different ethnic background, try to figure out why you reacted so strongly. If you get the chance, ask the person to explain his or her thinking. Ask the Lord to bless these conversations with those around you!

Wrapping Things Up

The good news for us is that God has given us everything we need to win this battle. We need to be aware of who our enemy is, but as Paul pointed out, Jesus has already won the victory, and God has equipped us with all the tools we need to stand firm when Satan attacks most savagely.