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# THE ENEMY WITHOUT

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If you look up the biography of General John Sedgwick in an encyclopedia, it will tell you he is a Union officer who was killed in action at the Battle of the Wilderness in the Civil War. But it probably won't tell you how he died. Here is the story:

The general was walking along the wall of a fortification, inspecting his troops. He came to a notch in the protective parapet of the fort, where he paused for a moment to look out across the battlefield toward the enemy lines.

One of Sedgwick's officer's cleared his throat nervously. "General," he said, "I don't think it's safe to stand there. You are exposed to the enemy's muzzle."

"Nonsense," the general replied confidently. "They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist--"

And those were his last words. It doesn't pay to underestimate your enemy. In the spiritual realm, our enemy is Satan, and many Christians have made the fatal mistake of underestimating his deadly power. In this chapter, we take a closer look at our enemy so that we can better understand--and defend ourselves against--his strategy.

### **Our ministry**

As we have already seen, on the basis of the new covenant, inner problems--fear, tension, hostility, inadequacy, or shame--can be quickly handled as we enthrone Jesus Christ in our lives and trust His love and care for us. In this way, we are left free to concentrate on the ministry before us--a ministry Paul refers to (with that eternal optimism that marked his apostolic career), when he says, "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart" (2 Corinthians 4:1). In the original Greek the word translated "this" is very definitive; "this kind of a ministry" is the thought. The kind he refers to is that which he has just described: a ministry in the new covenant where all veils are removed by a repeated turning to the Lord, and where the Spirit within reveals the character of Christ in ever-increasing areas of life.

How can there be room for discouragement in that kind of a ministry? There will be failures, for the flesh is wily and elusive, but they need only be momentary setbacks. In any case, God never intended that our mistakes should produce condemnation in our lives. Rather, each mistake we make is to be a learning experience which leads to our growth, restoration, and renewed activity in the strength of the Lord. Because we have been given this ministry by a merciful God, we do not lose heart--even when we make mistakes. By God's mercy, we pick ourselves up and keep moving forward.

Whatever form our ministry takes, it will bear the characteristic marks of the new covenant--simplicity, liberty, and effectiveness. Paul describes it in these terms: "Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2).

In line with the two-step walk in the Spirit which we discussed in the previous chapter, we have here also a

negative and positive description of a new covenant ministry. First, the negative: "We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God." Once again the first century sounds strangely like our own. In Paul's time there were men (and surely, women too) who felt it necessary to produce instant and visible results in order to appear successful in their ministry. It didn't matter whether the ministry was a public or private one, success rested upon obtaining some visible sign of achievement. Consequently, they turned to what Paul calls "secret and shameful ways" to produce the desired results.

It is only necessary to note the similar activities of our own day to know specifically what these disgraceful tactics were. Undoubtedly they consisted of psychological gimmicks, pressure tactics, emotional pleas, heavy-handed demands, just as we see all too frequently today. They would also include high-powered promotional campaigns, self-advertising posters and handouts, and the continual emphasis upon numbers as an indicator of success. There is, of course, a legitimate use of publicity for informational purposes, but promotion is something else again. It was Jesus who warned, "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).

In straightforward fashion, Paul renounced all these psychological tricks to gain impressive results. Perhaps he had even practiced them himself in the days of his phariseism, and even, for awhile, after he became a Christian. But no more. They were not needed for a qualified minister of the new covenant. Furthermore, he refused to practice deception (or, as the RSV has it, "cunning"), as evidently many others were doing in his day. The thought behind "cunning" is a readiness to try anything. It conveys the idea of being unprincipled, without morals or scruples. In these days of religious racketeers, it hardly requires any enlarging upon. It is simple expediency, justifying the means by the apparently good ends achieved.

A final state of dishonesty was reached by those who descended to actually tampering with the Word of God to obtain the appearance of success they desired. This was not, as we might think today, an altering of the text of the Bible. There were very few copies of the Scriptures available in the first century. It meant, rather, a twisting of the meaning of Scripture or a misapplication of truth--a pressing of it to unwarranted extremes. A case in point is that of Hymeneas and Philetus who taught that the resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:17-18). While they didn't deny the resurrection, they tampered with the Word of God by relegating the resurrection to the past. It was probably a result of teaching partial truth instead of the entire scope of revelation. Many of the newer cults emerging today are employing this tactic to the confusion and hurt of many. True, this all sounds biblical, but it is actually tampering with the Word of God by subtle and devious means.

## **No boasting needed**

None of these approaches is needed in a new covenant ministry, Paul declares. They mark the very antithesis of it, and the appearance of any of them in a ministry would indicate the indulgence of the flesh. There are a thousand or more ways by which the flesh can seek to counterfeit the work of the Spirit, and they are all aimed at one point: the achieving of an appearance of "success," which can then be used to enhance the prestige or status of the persons concerned. Because these practices are so prevalent in our day (as they evidently were in the first century, too) many young, relatively immature Christians are caught up in them without realizing it. Since few voices are raised to challenge them, such practices are easily accepted as proper. But it is at this point that the Word of God must judge us all. As Paul says a little later in this same letter, "But, 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.' For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends" (2 Corinthians 10:17-18).

In stark contrast to the multiplicity of evil is the simplicity of truth. In a great positive declaration, the apostle describes his own practice and the practice of all who labor in the liberty and sweetness of the new covenant: "...by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2b).

There is a precise and clear definition of a new covenant ministry as it would appear in any public manifestation. The method is single and invariable: "by the open statement of the truth." Nothing more is ever needed. The truth as it is in Jesus is so radical, so startling in its breadth of dimension, so universal, so relevant to human life everywhere that no psychological tricks are needed to prop it up and make it effective or

interesting. It is the most captivating subject known, for it concerns man himself, and at his deepest levels.

## **Right before God**

The goal of Paul's proclamation is equally clear: "we commend ourselves to every man's conscience." The conscience, as used here, is the will of the human spirit as contrasted to that more fluctuating and flexible entity, the will of the soul. It is what a man knows he "ought" to do, whether he always does it or not. It is the deep awareness within every person of what it takes to be the kind of person he or she admires and basically wants to be.

To appeal to the conscience, therefore, is to seek to capture the whole man: body, soul, and spirit--mentally, emotionally, and volitionally. It does not aim at mere intellectual agreement and certainly not at a shallow emotional commitment. Rather, it seeks to impress the conscience that commitment to Jesus is right; that is, in line with reality, and the only way to true fulfillment. It does not, therefore, demand immediate and visible results, though it will welcome any that may come; it is content to allow time for the growth of the seed that is planted and recognizes that individuals can only properly respond to what they clearly perceive and understand.

Finally, this is to be done "in the sight of God." As we have seen, this means an awareness that God is watching all that is done, appraising it and seeking to correct it where needed. But the phrase suggests even more. Since the new covenant is "everything coming from God," it means also that the inner eye of the soul is looking to God for the supply of power and resource to make the ministry effective. The responsibility for results is placed squarely on God alone. This is what gives the spirit of the worker a sense of serenity and peace. He or she is free to be an instrument in God's hands. That is the new covenant ministry in its outreach to the world.

## **That veil again**

At this point in Paul's letter the unpleasant realities of life intrude again. That is the glory of the gospel; it never deals merely with the ideal but with life as it is, "warts and all." Ideally, if God is responsible for results and is desirous that all men be saved, then whenever the gospel is preached or taught there should be many responses. But in actual practice, this is not always true. What about those times? To this implied question the apostle responds: "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Once again the veil of pride appears in this discussion. The reference this time is not to the veils which evangelicals employ but to those used by worldly men and women when they are confronted with the good news about Jesus. Paul referred earlier to the phenomenon of being at the same time "life unto life" to some who hear his preaching and "death unto death" to others. The latter fail to see anything good in the "good news" because there is a veil over their minds, obscuring their ability to perceive the truth. To them the gospel appears unrealistic, remote from real life, making its appeal only to those who have a streak of "religion" in them. But it is their outlook which is the illusion.

And here is where we glimpse the enemy without. As Paul puts it, "The god of this age [Satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers." As always, Satan uses pride to blind their eyes. They are so confident of their own ability to handle life, so sure that they have what it takes to solve their problems. To them, therefore, Jesus appears to be dispensable, hardly worth considering. They fail to see that He stands at the center of life and that all reality derives its content from him. To argue against Him is to argue with the very power that makes it possible to take the breath which voices the argument! Jesus is Lord, whether men know it or not, and ultimately "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

## **Don't dodge life--or death**

It is helpful to know just when this satanic blinding takes place. A superficial reading of the passage leaves the

impression that the minds are blinded or veiled after they hear the gospel preached. They hear it and reject it and, as a consequence, their minds are blinded. That is the common way of understanding this passage. But Paul declares that the blinding is to keep people from seeing the light of the gospel, therefore it must occur *before* the gospel is heard. They are called "unbelievers," not because they don't believe the gospel, but because there is something else they have not believed in even before the gospel was heard. What is that? It is *reality*, the way things really are. The god of this world, the enemy without, has successfully accustomed them to live by illusions which they take to be reality. They are not willing to face life as it is. Men are turned away from truth long before they hear the gospel because they *refuse to examine life realistically*.

A common example of this is the way many people avoid the word death. Death is an unpleasant subject, yet it is a stark reality with which every one of us must ultimately wrestle. Watch how uncomfortable many people are at funerals and how they want the service to be as short as possible in order to return to the familiar illusions they regard as real. Instead of grappling with the fact of death and facing its implications in life right now (which might very well prepare them to believe the gospel when they hear it), they choose to run away and hide their heads in the sand until the inevitable encounter with death leaves them no way of escape.

Escapism can be seen in many other ways, as well. Most people do not like to see themselves as they really are. They choose to believe a more acceptable image of themselves, even though there may come moments of truth when they suddenly see themselves unveiled. Some people train themselves to avoid anything unpleasant or difficult, and so they find themselves unwittingly trapped by the god of this world into believing fantasies and treating illusions as though they were real. Such people are very difficult to reach with the gospel. To them it is often a fragrance of death unto death.

Yet, occasionally, one meets non-Christians who have been trained to face life realistically and not to run from difficult things. They are usually those who have had a considerable amount of self-discipline and are accustomed to taking orders from someone else. For example, soldiers frequently fit this description. Upon hearing the gospel these kind of individuals often accept it immediately. To them Jesus "fits." They sense immediately that he is that missing center they have long been seeking. There is no veil over their eyes.

### **The secret of being like God**

It is tragic, though, that those who fail to see the gospel as reality are turning away from the very thing they most desperately want to find. The center of the gospel is Christ, and Christ, as Paul tells us here, is the likeness of God. Therefore, what is lost to these people is the secret of godlikeness--and that is what men long for more than anything else. God is a totally independent being, having no need within himself for anyone or anything else, and yet, in love, giving himself freely to all his creatures. It is that same kind of independence which humanity craves. To most people, that is the essence of godlikeness, and that is why people are clamoring, "Let me be myself! I've gotta be me!"

What people fail to understand, in this veiled view of reality, is that such independence for human beings must arise out of dependence. It is God's desire that people be godlike. He wants us to be independent of all other creatures or things in the universe precisely because we are totally dependent on him.

It was no lie for Satan to say to Eve in the garden, "If you eat of this fruit you will become like God." It was very difficult for Eve to see anything wrong with that because, after all, that was what God wanted. He desires godlike people. This is apparent throughout Scripture. "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:4-5). What Eve did not understand was that only through Christ is godlikeness possible. Paul expresses his own amazement over the concept in 1 Timothy 3:16, "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body..." Godlikeness is, of course, the new covenant in action--"everything coming from God, nothing coming from me."

### **The light dawns**

Well, what about these people whose minds are blinded? Are they without hope? Is there no way to reach them in their darkness? Paul's answer to that is magnificent: "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as

Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:5,6).

Paul's argument is that the preaching of Jesus as Lord (the center and heart of all reality, the One in control of all events) is a message that is honored by God, and God is a being of incredible power and authority. In fact, He is the one who at creation commanded the light to *shine out* of darkness. Notice, he did not command the light to shine *into* the darkness--He literally commanded the darkness to produce light!

Now why are these people perishing? Their minds, Paul said, are blinded; that is, they live in darkness. They have already turned from the normal way by which God proposes to save men--that is, by an honest response to reality (see Hebrews 11:6). But their case is not hopeless, for the God whom Paul preaches is able to call light out of darkness. Light they must have, but if they reject the light of nature and life, there is still the possibility that when they hear the good news that Jesus is Lord, God will do a creative act and call light *out of* their Stygian darkness. For this reason the Christian can always witness in hope, knowing that a sovereign God will work in resurrection power to call light out of darkness in many hearts. Jesus knew this: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37).

Paul sees himself as one of these men. Before his conversion experience he had been intent on pleasing God, committed to this great objective and doing his dedicated best to fulfill it, yet the darkness in which he lived was so deep that when he saw and heard Jesus, he could not recognize him as the Son of God but thought him to be a usurper and a vagabond. But on the road to Damascus he was suddenly overwhelmed with light. Out of the darkness of his brilliant mind the light shone and illuminated the darkness of his dedicated heart. There he experienced what he had long sought--the knowledge of the glory of God. To his utter amazement he found it where he least expected: in the face of Jesus Christ.

God set aside young Saul's brilliance, his dedication, and his blameless morality as having done nothing to advance him on his search for reality. Suddenly it was all made clear--Jesus is Lord! Using that key, everything began to fall into place; the universe and life itself began to make sense. And best of all, Paul found himself fulfilled as a man. Jesus was real and was with him night and day. Courage and peace and power were his as a daily inheritance, enriching his life beyond all expectation. He had found the secret of godlikeness--*of being like God!*

Because of his own experience the apostle is careful now to keep his preaching sharply focused on the only subject God will honor by calling light out of darkness--that is, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5). The danger in preaching is that all too often we offer ourselves as the remedy for man's need. We speak about the church or Christian education or the Christian way of life, when all the time what people need is Jesus. The church cannot save, a knowledge of Christian philosophy does not heal, doctrine without love puffs up. Only Jesus is Lord, only He is absolutely essential to life. When He is encountered, all the other things will fall into their proper places.

### **A servant heart**

In view of this, the role of the Christian is that of a servant. He is there to discover the needs of others and to do whatever his master tells him to do to meet those needs. He is, therefore, a servant "for Jesus' sake." He is never the servant of men, but he is Jesus' servant and therefore serves men. That is an important distinction. A friend of mine said, "The tragic error I made was that I became a servant of people. I felt obligated to respond favorably when anyone called and asked me to do something. Someone would say, 'I think you ought to do such and such,' and I would say, 'Right, I'd better do it.' Then five other people would tell me what they thought I should do. Suddenly I found myself in trouble because I couldn't do everything. But when I checked the life of Jesus, I found that He was a servant of the Father, not a servant of people. He submitted himself to the people whom the Father picked out. That set me free."

God always honors a message centered on the Lordship of Jesus, and which manifests a servant's heart to those whom he sets in your path. The god of this world, the enemy without, is clever and subtle. He knows how to lead men into darkness without their being aware of what is happening. But the God of resurrection is

more than his equal. He will honor the open statement of the truth with the light of the glory of God, pouring from the face of Jesus Christ.

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