

“Beyond the Schemes of the Devil”

Ephesians 6:10–13

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by Senior Pastor Hong Poonghwa

Ephesians 6:10–13 (PowerPoint)

Preface

Returning to the Epistle to the Ephesians, I would like to continue reflecting on the battle against evil spirits, and on standing firm against the schemes of the devil.

When we speak of standing firm against the schemes of the devil, Scripture teaches us that there is something we must keep in mind.

That is, evil is not merely something on the level of thoughts or feelings that arise from within us as human beings.

Before evil thoughts or evil intentions come forth from within “me,” we must know that there exists a ruling power that stimulates those evil thoughts and intentions and seeks to lead us to act impulsively in doing evil.

From the worldview of what is called “science,” which in this world is sometimes granted something like absolute authority—so much so that when it is held up before us like Mito Kōmon’s seal, we are rendered speechless and can only fall down before it saying, “Aah—!”—evil is described as “the absence of perfection.”

From a so-called evolutionary perspective, which sees things developing toward something more advanced, it is said that “because human beings have not yet reached a perfect dimension and have not arrived at a state of completeness, things that can be called evil occur, and corruption takes place.”

But the Bible says, “Our struggle is not against evil or against evil people, but against the rulers of this dark world who are leading evil,” and that it is “a struggle against those who darken the most fundamental and essential intelligence of human beings—that is, the intelligence by which we know God.”

Ephesians 6:12 (PowerPoint)

Scripture teaches us that the one who seeks to devour and overthrow us—the ruler of evil called Satan, of whom Jesus said to His disciple Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail”—is gripping humanity with power, shaking us, controlling us, and concentrating all his energies on manipulating us at will.

And yet, surprisingly, it seems that Christians are rather reluctant to talk much about such matters concerning the devil.

Part One

For example, when you try to tell someone else about Jesus, would you want to talk about sin and judgment, or would you rather talk about love and blessing?

When you first heard about Jesus, which came first—sin and judgment, or love and blessing?

When we want to introduce Christianity to someone, which do we wish to use, sin and judgement or love and blessing?

Of course, either is fine.

Whether we speak first about sin and judgment, or first about love and blessing, methodologically speaking, either approach is acceptable.

However, when we think about the content itself, a concern arises: “Has Christianity in Japan today become one-sided, focusing only on love and blessing?”

And I also feel that “if that becomes too biased, it might actually become dangerous.”

This is because, rather than presenting Christian faith as something factual and concrete, we may end up explaining Christianity primarily as something that comforts people and adjusts itself to their feelings and hearts.

There is a danger that, before we realize it, Christian faith becomes little different from man-made religions or concepts of God—pleasant, ear-tickling stories shaped according to our own preferences.

At times I am led to wonder whether Christianity has become something like this: “Don’t say things that are hard to talk about; don’t say things that might seem strange; it is fine to say or do things that are relatively acceptable and remain within the bounds of what is considered common sense by worldly standards and atmosphere—but beyond that, don’t say it, don’t do it, don’t express it.” Has Christianity become something wrapped

up in the furoshiki of the world, as though enveloped and constrained by it? Are we not continuing to drag along a state similar to that of the wartime Japanese church—a Christianity that was absorbed and rounded off by society?

As is pointed out in the book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament, there is a condition in which “from the least to the greatest, everyone is greedy for gain, and they heal the wound of My people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” At times I feel a certain tension, wondering whether we are not in a state that has lost the sense of urgency found in the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Must we conform to Christianity or the teachings of the Bible, or must Christianity—must the teaching of Scripture—conform us to itself?

Which is absolute?

The teaching of Scripture, Christianity, the teaching of Christ, is absolute.

Therefore, speaking first about love and blessing, or speaking only about them, if we make a wrong step, carries the danger of adjusting Christianity to our own needs and trying to confine it within the limits of what we can accept.

In this context, I believe that a complacent understanding of the existence of the devil, and a careless treatment of the devil’s schemes and attacks, is extremely dangerous.

This is because we become unable to notice that, instead of engaging in a battle against spiritual blindness and darkness—rather than a question of whether the devil exists or not—we are being made to fight a kind of fratricidal battle, people striking against people.

Contrary to the reality that there is Satan who seeks to make us ignorant in the most essential intelligence by which human beings know God, and who seeks to prevent the light of Christ from shining upon us—contrary to the fact that there exists a ruling power that causes us to do evil—we stop trying to recognize that we have fallen squarely into the devil’s scheme of making us fight a different kind of battle, a battle based on other concepts altogether.

And so people easily end up thinking, “A person’s enemy is another person,” or “That person is the enemy,” and they spend their days consumed with fighting against others.

The image of the first man, Adam, who committed the first sin—seeing not Satan disguised as the serpent, who had so cleverly trapped them, but rather seeing his

beloved wife Eve as the first enemy of humanity—clearly reflects the posture of us human beings.

By failing to recognize the true enemy, the devil, humanity has been unable to escape the spiral of turning people into enemies and fighting against one another, and has accumulated its history in this way.

Ironically, it even appears that humanity has justified this path of making people enemies by elevating those who excelled in battles and competitions against others, or those who emerged victorious, and enshrining them as heroes.

That is why Jesus repeatedly, earnestly, and yet gently and compassionately, spoke about what is essential.

“You may have been told, ‘Hate your enemy,’ but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. For your Father in heaven causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

“Do not mistake who your enemy is,” Jesus taught us.

Part Two

But in reality, the existence of the devil, the existence of evil spirits, and the power of evil possessed by the rulers of this dark world are producing results in which we human beings fail to recognize even everything that leads us to acknowledge the existence of God and the reality of the spiritual world.

In a world overflowing with man-made things and filled with struggles to obtain them, we end up living not for a battle that fixes our eyes on, grasps, and seeks to gain the invisible, glory-filled things that endure forever, but for a different kind of battle altogether.

We must ask whether we have turned the faith that has been graciously given to us into nothing more than a tool—used only for battles of flesh and blood, that is, for realizing ideas and desires that suit our own tastes and values and that sound pleasant to our own ears.

In C. S. Lewis’s book *The Screwtape Letters*, there is a passage in which a senior devil writes advice to a junior devil on how to keep a person in a state of not believing in God. It goes like this:

“Thanks to the operations we set in motion among human beings centuries ago, people have come to think it almost impossible to believe in unfamiliar things as long as

familiar things lie before their eyes. Do not make the mistake of using something like science; but if you must use it, keep your patient absorbed in sociology and economics, and make sure he does not stray from that supremely valuable thing called 'real life.' Keep hammering into him the ordinariness of things. Make him feel that he already knows all this, and keep giving him the grand general idea that everything he happens to have heard or seen is 'the result of recent research.' Never forget that you are there to fool him. It is our job, as devils, to 'educate.'"

The devil is exerting himself with all his might, using his own kind of wisdom and knowledge, in order to keep people away from knowing God.

And where, in particular, is he trying to keep people? He tries to keep them confined to this visible world alone, to that supremely valuable thing called "real life." He whispers that this world is a happy place, that one should suck up as much of its sweet juice as possible before going to the Kingdom of Heaven; that going to the Kingdom of Heaven should be delayed as long as possible; that one should fill one's mind as much as possible with the matters of this world; that the Kingdom of Heaven is a place one can go after becoming a winner in the battles of flesh and blood in this world. And thus, before we even realize it, he seeks to fill our hearts completely with visible things and with visible battles.

So then, what is it that is required of us?

Ephesians 6:11–12 (PowerPoint)

It is to remember this fact and this reality, to turn our eyes to it, and to pray.

Day after day, through everything, we are continually being imprinted with the idea that "what is visible is everything," and we are being led—indeed, directed by the very existence called Satan—to judge, distinguish, evaluate, and rank things only by what is visible. To see through this, to kneel before God, and to pray—this is what is required.

The confession of the Apostle Paul comes vividly to mind.

2 Corinthians 4:18–5:2 (PowerPoint)

Philippians 1:20–23 (PowerPoint)

Can we say “Amen” to this confession, teaching, truth, and reality of the Apostle Paul: “to depart and be with Christ is far better”?

As Christians living in this modern age, where we are continually conditioned to think that what is visible is everything, we need to feel a sense of spiritual tension. For it may be that, before we realize it, we are no longer able to see or accept the truth that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms,” and that our spiritual field of vision is gradually being weakened.

I believe that what is required of us is a spiritual awakening in which the words of Jesus—“Already now is the time of the end, when many will be led astray, and the one who endures to the end will be saved”—enter us as fact and reality.

We try to keep believing in Jesus Christ within the bounds of what society calls common sense. We accept and believe only what remains within those bounds, and we come to think—before we even realize it—that faith is useful and valuable only insofar as it accepts only what can be explained from the perspective of so-called science, which appears to function like Mito Kōmon’s seal of authority in this modern, Tower-of-Babel-like world: the powers, grounds, ideas, concepts, and authorities that have constructed this age. Faith becomes something valuable only in terms of what causes no inconvenience, what can be accepted, and what helps solve the various problems that arise in daily life.

With our mouths we say, “Father God,” “Lord Jesus,” and we profess eternal life, yet in the way we live each day—in our methods, principles, and ways of thinking—we remain thoroughly worldly, confined within worldly standards.

In other words, we have come to no longer pray.

Not praying ultimately means that, in the very arena of our faith life, we have abandoned spiritual warfare and are instead fighting worldly battles by worldly means.

It concerns how we perceive the problems we realistically encounter in the arena of life, how we respond to them, and how we view them with a spiritual perspective.

Part Three

Using the very problems we realistically encounter in the arena of life, Satan steers us not toward a battle against them, but toward a battle against flesh and blood.

Concretely speaking, he leads us either not to pray at all, or even if we do pray, not to listen attentively to the faint, gentle voice by which God speaks.

When hardship comes, he directs us to hate the person whom we think caused that hardship. When illness comes, he makes the promise of eternal life and the inheritance of the Kingdom of God seem exceedingly small, as though it were nothing, stripping us of peace. He stirs up resentment and bitterness toward a God who does not heal us, so that we might taste even more of the happiness preached by this “happy” world. If we lack material things, he fosters dissatisfaction; if we abound in them, he tempts us toward pride. In any case, he does everything he can to keep us confined within the bounds of this world.

Then why does God still allow such Satan, such devils, such evil spirits, to remain active?

I believe the answer is found in the words confessed by Job in the midst of his suffering at the hands of Satan.

Job 23:10 (PowerPoint)

While Satan mobilizes all his strength to afflict Job and drive him away from God, attempting to hinder God’s work and deeds, Job says:

“But He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

Satan tested, tried, and tempted Job, but God intended—even through their very activity—to refine Job like gold, and in fact fashioned him into a far more magnificent servant of God than he had been before his suffering.

Not only Job, but through every suffering and trial, God made David David, Moses Moses, and Peter Peter.

This is what God intends to do.

From Psalm 119—

Psalm 119:71–72, 75 (PowerPoint)

Can we believe this word?

Do you believe it?

God is not trying to overthrow us or to harm us. Rather, He does this because He must refine us and uproot the poisonous weeds within us.

That is why Scripture says, “Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance have its perfect work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2–4).

Furthermore, it says, “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, for having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own desire” (James 1:12–14).

Satan stimulates our sin and attacks us, seeking to crush us through that sin. But we need to know and believe that the Lord is using even that to shape us like gold.

Only then, even if I face trials today, will I discover that they are for my benefit. I will also come to realize that I am a weak believer who finds it difficult to continue believing wholeheartedly in Jesus, and that if left even slightly unattended, there is a deeply rooted sinful tendency within me to love the world, flee to the world, and abandon God.

In this way, we cling more and more tightly to God the Father, to the Lord Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit. We learn that we must strike our own chests and compel ourselves to submit to God, and we are driven to pray with spiritual tension.

And finally,

2 Corinthians 4:17 (PowerPoint)

we will come to discover, as an undeniable fact, that we stand in this place of glory.

Conclusion

Therefore, stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

Resist the schemes of the devil.

Do not be defeated by the schemes of the devil.

Discern, through prayer and the Word, the schemes of Satan who tries by all means to tear people apart and urges us to stand in places of evil that cling to lies, stubbornness, and obstinacy.

God allows Satan's attacks in our daily lives so that we may become aware of the evil within ourselves.

It is so that we may acknowledge before God that we are indeed sinners, that there are certainly parts of us that have been tamed by Satan, discover that we can do nothing about those parts by our own strength, and recognize—by the free will given to us—that we must cling to God, rely on Him, pray, and even cling desperately to Him so that He may cut them out and sanctify us. This is so that, not by coercion, but by my own honest confession before God, I may acknowledge this truth.

And it is so that we may meet our sanctified selves in Christ Jesus—made unshakable by grace, no longer harmed even when the same points are attacked again and again.

This is truly the grace of the Lord and the guiding blessing of God.

Therefore, we can thank the Lord our God, in Christ, knowing that whatever we encounter is not meant to crush us.

Even when we face trials, suffering, and incomprehensible injustice, and are tormented by them, we can give thanks that we are led to look squarely at the impatience, ignorance, stubbornness, and impurity that well up within our hearts, and to recognize and confess, "There is still this much evil within me."

With tears of gratitude, we pray: "Lord, once again, here it is. Please uproot this evil within me. It may be painful, but help me to feel even that pain as Your grace. Lead me so that, when I look back later, I may confess that that time was truly a special blessing You gave." And as we pray this, I hope that we will firmly establish and nurture our position as Christians.

Let us be nurtured by God.

Let us pray.

Benediction: James 1:13