

- ***READ II Peter 5:8,9 & Ephesians 6:10,11,13*** There is an ancient book entitled *"The Art Of War."* This book was written by a man named Sun Tzu over 2,000 years ago during the time of blood civil wars that were taking place in the far east. The principles that can be found within this book have been used throughout history and have even influenced the outcomes of world wars. The writings of this book are founded upon a couple of key foundational points, and one of these points is going to be our consideration for this evening. *"If you know the enemy and know yourself you need not fear the result of a hundred battles."* Let's connect this idea with the verses we just read.
 - We see very clearly from these texts that we have an enemy in this life. He is the devil, and he is seeking souls to devour. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit has inspired men to write and warn us of the devil and the ways in which he seeks to attack us. In fact, the warning of **Ephesians 6:11** is that we take steps in order to be able to stand strong against the many schemes of the devil. There is much hanging in the balance in this war. Souls are at stake, and we would do well to not neglect the consideration of how we go about being engaged in this war. This was another one of Sun Tzu's foundational principles within his book. He also wrote this, *"The art of war is of vital importance to the state. it is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected."* Sun Tzu accurately recognized this as being true in human warfare, but it is of even more importance when it comes to our battling against Satan and his forces of evil which are trying to destroy our souls and lead us to spiritual ruin.
 - The question then is this..."How does Satan attack us?" This question could be answered in many different ways, but this evening I would like for us to look at what might arguably be Satan's Deadliest Scheme. We will begin by looking at where Satan focuses his attacks. We will then look at just how sinister Satan is willing to go in order to destroy us. We will finish with some admonitions as to what we must do if we want to truly stand strong against Satan and his wicked ways.
- I. Satan attacks in many different ways, but focuses on our own personal desires.**
- A. James clearly shows us that Satan acts upon our desires in his temptations.**
1. In **James 1:13-15**, we read of exactly how it is that temptation finds its way into our lives. James begins by pointing out that the temptations we face in this life are not a result of God, *"for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does to tempt anyone."* With this cleared up, it seems pretty evident to me that temptations are a result of the work of the evil one who is our enemy, the devil. I think this is further solidified by what the fact that Satan is referred to as the tempter in **Matthew 4:3**.
 2. Further, let's notice just where it is that Satan seeks to tempt us. The text tells us that we are tempted when we are carried away by our own desires and lust. In other words, we are tempted in those areas in which we already have desires in some form or another. Now, some of those desires might be bad news from the very nature of what they are. For instance, if I have the desire to steal things...well that is bad in and of itself. If I have a desire to murder people...that, too, is very bad within itself. These things make easy sense to us because these things are inherently bad and evil.
 3. However, there are some desire that we have that are not in and of themselves bad or evil. For example, there is nothing wrong with a desire to eat. There is nothing wrong with the desire to seek sexual fulfillment. There is nothing wrong with a desire to obtain wealth. There is nothing wrong with a desire to be successful in this life. These desires and others that could have been used as examples are things that are not inherently wrong. Yet...they are things that Satan will seek to use against us in order to lead us to sin. If our desires are for stealing or murder then Satan will most definitely use those desires of our heart, but he will also seek to use those other desires to entice us to step over a line and sin against God.

4. Satan is obviously going to do whatever is necessary in order to cause us to sin against God so that we might be separated from Him in our sin, but I believe he is still crafty and will be smart with his efforts to tempt us. What I mean by this is that he is not going to try to use things that we have no interest in to tempt us. If I am someone who has no real interest in alcohol then Satan is not going to use that as an area in which to attack me. That is a place where I don't have a weakness, and it would make little sense to seek to tempt me in that way. This is something that Sun Tzu also recognized for he said, *"Avoid what is strong and strike at which is weak."*

B. This has been Satan's strategy from the very beginning.

1. And I do me from the very beginning. Notice with me in **Genesis 3:1-6** that the serpent sought to work upon Eve's desires as he tempted her. He sought to make sin enticing. We see this especially in **vv.4-6**. After Satan misrepresents God's words concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he then seeks to straight up contradict what God said by saying, *"You sure will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God knowing good and evil."* Notice that the tempter seeks to make eating of the fruit desirable.
2. If Eve at this point still had no desire to eat of the fruit then things might have turned out very differently. However, we see in this text that the words of the serpent did a number on Eve and that she *"saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise..."* Satan worked Eve until the point that she desired that which would lead her to sin. Was there anything inherently wrong with the fruit? Fruit in and of itself was not a bad thing to have, and that's what makes Satan so dangerous...He is conniving and will use anything he can to his advantage against us.

II. Satan is a conniving enemy who will seek to turn the blessings of God into stumbling blocks of sin.

A. Our God has been mighty good to us and blesses us in countless ways.

1. Let's say again that there was nothing wrong with eating fruit when it came to Adam and Eve and their provisions in the Garden of Eden. There was nothing wrong with them eating the fruit that had been given to them by God. There is nothing wrong with eating the food that God has similarly blessed us with. In the same way, there is nothing wrong with finding sexual fulfillment with the spouse that God has blessed us with. Additionally, there is nothing wrong with possessing wealth that we have worked for in a godly manner.
2. I'll also add that there are other things in this life that are tools given to us by God in various ways that can be used appropriately. Our material wealth could be mentioned, but alcohol is one such thing that first comes to mind that is given to us by God that has its proper usage. Even back in Biblical times we can note that alcohol could be used medicinally. This is most famously seen in **I Timothy 5:23** when Paul tells Timothy to drink a little wine for the sake of his stomach and the ailments that he struggled with. This continues to be the case because there are a number of medicines that many of us use that contain a percentage of alcohol. When used in this manner, alcohol is being used in an appropriate way. The same could be said for any other number of drugs that we might take for pain relief or other reasons. These things have been given to us by God, and they can be used in an appropriate way that doesn't misuse His goodness.

B. Satan is sinister and seeks to take those blessings of God and use them against us.

1. However, what Satan loves to do is take that which is not bad in and of itself and tempt us to use it in such a way that it does become sinful. Any number of the things I have already mentioned this evening can be used or pursued in such a way that we become guilty of sin. Remember, there was nothing wrong with eat fruit in the Garden of Eden. The trouble came into play when Satan tempted Eve to eat of the fruit that she was not permitted to eat by God. He took a blessing of God and used it against Eve to lead her into temptation and sin.

2. He continues to give effort to do the exact same thing to us in various ways. For example, there is nothing wrong with eating. God has blessed us all with the ability to eat pretty good food on a day to day basis. However, we must be aware that Satan could seek to use our enjoyment of good food to turn food into an idol within our lives. If that becomes the case then there will be nothing that will stop us from eating. Our minds will be consumed with food and we will be willing to do whatever it takes to get food that we want. Stealing food or taking someone else's food won't even come across our minds as being something that is wrong.
3. In the same way, finding sexual fulfillment in this life is clearly something that has been given to us by God in the context of the marriage union. ***"Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled..." (Hebrews 13:4)*** We are permitted by God and even encouraged in **Proverbs 5:18,19** to enjoy the physical relationship that comes with having a spouse. However, Satan seeks to turn that sexual fulfillment into something that we can't live without and will do anything to obtain. That means that we might even be willing to find that fulfillment from someone other than our spouse, and in doing so we sin before God.
4. Lastly in our examples, consider how Satan for centuries has used alcohol as a tool to bring many people to shame, ruin, and even death. This tool that has been given to us by Satan that can be used in numerous appropriate ways has been used by so many in a manner that brings nothing but shame to God. Drunkenness and using alcohol in a manner in which we try to lose grip on reality is clearly condemned within Scripture (**I Peter 4:3**), and instead of using alcohol in those ways that are appropriate, Satan has turned it into a tool that is most notably known for causing people to lose all sense, to lose ability to make good and godly decisions, and to a place where they put the lives of others in danger.
5. This is what Satan wants. He wants for us to take that which is fine in and of itself and to use it or seek it in a manner that is against God's will. Worst of all is that we are sometimes completely blinded to how such a thing could be wrong. This again falls right in line with Sun Tzu's book in which he writes, ***"Supreme excellence consist in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting."*** If Satan can get us to see these things as being given by God and being things that we deserve to enjoy no matter what...then he has us exactly where he wants us, and he can help lead us to places where we are willing to do anything in order to fulfill these desires that we have within ourselves.

III. In order to overcome, we must be a people who are sober-minded, disciplined, and self-controlled.

A. Firstly, we need to honestly evaluate our points of weakness in our natural desires.

1. There are just some things in our lives that we are more drawn to than others. It might be that we really love food and eating food. It might be that we really enjoy finding sexual fulfillment with another person. It might be that I really love money. It could be that I have grown to enjoy the buzz that comes from drinking alcohol or consuming some other sort of drug. Any number of things that we as individuals are naturally drawn to can be used by Satan against us.
2. We must be honest with ourselves and identify these areas in which we are vulnerable to attack because I guarantee that Satan already knows these areas of weakness within us. He has already scouted us out and he knows the ways in which he can attack. All he is waiting for is an opening. He truly is that crouching lion seeking and waiting for that opportunity in which we leave ourselves open to attack. If we are not willing to identify these areas then we are only hurting ourselves because we haven't made known the areas in which we really need to be on guard against Satan's attacks. Those points of desire or weakness are the areas in which Satan is going to attack the hardest and the most often. Therefore we must truly be on guard, we must be on the alert as Peter warns in **I Peter 5:8**.

B. Secondly, we must discipline ourselves to keep our minds right in these areas.

1. Notice again from **I Peter 5:8** that Peter says we must be sober in spirit along with being alert. In order for us to be alert, we must first be aware of the dangers that are around us. This means that we must make sure that our minds are prepared for the battle and we know how we are going to battle. Our battle strategy is to put on the whole armor of God from **Ephesians 6:10-17**. We are to be a people of truth, righteousness, and faith. We are to be a people who stand firm in the Gospel and embrace the salvation that has been extended to us by our loving and gracious Father in heaven.
2. Yet, additionally in this particular conversation, we must also be a people who are disciplined and self-controlled. Remember, our discussion is based upon the fact that Satan will seek to use that which is not wrong in and of itself against us. This means that we must recognize that which is a blessing from God and only seek to enjoy it or use it in the ways that bring Him honor and glory. Self-control and discipline are found to be a part of some pretty important lists and admonitions that we have within our New Testament writings.
 - a) *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, **self-control**; against such things there is no law."* (**Galatians 5:22,23**)
 - b) *"Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, **self-control**, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (**II Peter 1:5-8**)
 - c) *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises **self-control** in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I **discipline** my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."* (**I Corinthians 9:24-27**)
 - d) *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live **sensibly (self-controlled-my edit)**, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."* (**Titus 2:11-14**)
3. Identifying the weak areas is only part of the solution. Through these different texts, I hope it is evident the importance of being disciplined and self-controlled within our lives because Satan will very quickly use our lack of such to his advantage and our destruction.

We are all engaged in a battle in which the prize is our soul's salvation. If we want to obtain and hold on to such a salvation then we must recognize our enemy and prepare to battle strongly against him. He will fight dirty. He will seek to use that which is good against us, and yet we must stand firm. If we will live with an understanding of how to enjoy God's blessings and tools in an appropriate and righteous way then we have a real chance of holding off well the attacks of Satan. May God bless us as we strive daily to stand firm in His grace and mercy and use the full armor that He has provided for us to stand firm and defeat the devil in the evil days that we will face in this life. May all glory be to God as we withstand the devil and his deadliest of schemes.