

The Tactics of Terror

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In this present series we are coming away from a very troubled, confused and despairing world to give serious consideration to the only adequate explanation for the human dilemma ever offered. That explanation is put very briefly in the Apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 6:10-13:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. {Eph 6:10-13 RSV}

If this diagnosis is true, then it is the height of insanity to attempt to correct the world's problems without dealing with this evil power which is behind them, these principalities and powers that Paul speaks of, which he calls, "the world rulers of this present darkness."

Some time ago I heard of a mental hospital which had devised an unusual test to determine when their patients were ready to go back into the world. They brought any candidates for return into a room where a water tap was pouring water out over the floor. They handed the patient a mop and told him to mop up the water. If the patient had sense enough to turn off the tap before mopping up the water, he was ready to go back. But if, as in the case of many, he took the mop and started

mopping up the water with the tap still flowing, they knew more treatment was needed.

We laugh at that, but I am afraid we are laughing at ourselves, because that is what many people are doing. Each Christian, facing the personal world in which he lives, is given the mop of truth and told to use it. But we can only help in that world if we have enough intelligence to conquer first the evil which is pouring into our own hearts from these present rulers of world darkness. That is exactly what the apostle is urging. We can be of no possible help in the solutions of world problems as long as we remain part of the problems. Therefore, this whole passage is designed to awaken us and to call our attention to the need for understanding the nature of our problem.

We have already seen that the devil attacks humanity in two ways – directly and indirectly.

- The direct attack, involving an obvious and outright control of human personality, though it is the most dramatic, is the least dangerous of the forms the devil employs. There are relatively few in this world who are demon-possessed, though there are some.
- But it is through the indirect attack that most of the damage is done. As we saw, it is largely through the channels of the world and the flesh that the devil makes his attack upon human life.
- *The world* is human society, blindly and universally accepting false values, shallow concepts and insights and deluded ideas of reality,

as well as almost desperately insisting upon conformity to those standards and insights.

- *The flesh* is that inward urge within us toward total independence, toward being our own little gods and running our worlds to suit ourselves. It is that continual drift within us toward self-centeredness and selfishness.

You can see immediately how universal this is. Is there anyone who has never had this problem? Obviously this is the main battlefield where we fight against these world rulers of present darkness. This is not something remote from us, nor something which occasionally comes to a certain few Christians. This is a battle in which we are all engaged, every moment of our lives. We will never conquer in it unless we understand that and see it not as something reserved for Sundays, but something in which we are involved Mondays through Saturdays as well.

The flesh, this inner arena of battle, accompanies us everywhere we go. We cannot escape it, we cannot run away from it, we cannot go back to mother, and leave it behind. Therefore, we must begin our battle at this point.

But someone says, "I thought that when one became a Christian, Christ set you free from the kingdom of Satan. The devil can no longer touch you."

Is that your concept of the Christian life? Nothing could be more shallow, incomplete, and wrong! When you become a Christian the battle only begins. That is when it starts.

It is true the devil can never totally defeat a Christian. Those who are genuinely the Lord's, who are born again, who have come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, are delivered from total defeat. We do not hesitate to emphasize that. The devil can never get us back into the position of unconscious control which he once exercised over us, as he does over the rest of the world. But he can demoralize the Christian. He can frighten us, he can make us miserable, he can defeat us in many ways. He can make us weak and therefore barren and unfruitful in the things of God. It is quite possible to be more unhappy and miserable as a Christian than you ever were before you became a Christian, at least for periods of time.

The devil is especially interested in defeating Christians. After all, the unredeemed worldling is

not problem to the devil. As Jesus put it, "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace," {Luke 11:21 RSV}. All the quite sincere but rather pathetic efforts of worldlings to solve the problems of their lives through legislation, education and a change of environment do not bother the devil in the least. He is quite content to let them go on rearranging the pieces of the puzzle without ever solving it. But the presence of every Christian in this world bothers the devil greatly. Why? Well, because each Christian is a potential threat to the solidarity of the devil's kingdom, to his rule over the rest of mankind.

If the devil lets the Spirit of God have his way, any individual Christian, without exception, would be a powerful force to destroy the devil's kingdom of darkness. Each Christian would be to others a door of escape out of the unconscious control of these world rulers of present darkness. Every Christian would be a corridor of liberty, a center of light, dispelling the darkness and ignorance of the world around him. The devil cannot let that happen if he can help it. So he attacks the Christian, especially and particularly. He marshals all his forces against you, coming sometimes as a "roaring lion" {1 Pet 5:8}, in some catastrophic circumstance which seems to knock you off your feet so that you cannot stand, or coming as an "angel of light" {2 Cor 11:14}, alluring appealing, offering something that seems to be just the right thing for the right moment. The devil takes over in direct control of human life whenever he can. Thus we find men like Hitler arising on the world scene from time to time, demonic men, motivated by strange and unexplainable passions. Sometimes he assails us through the world, with its monstrous pressure to keep in line, not to be different, and its ostracism of those who attempt to swim against the stream. But most often the devil comes in disguise, through the channel of *the flesh* – our inner selves – with silken, subtle, suggestive wiles. That particularly is what the apostle is warning against – the wiles of the devil.

We must now take a closer look at this flesh within us:

According to the Bible, *the flesh*, in this symbolic sense, is identified with the body which ultimately dies. In Romans 8 the apostle says, "The body is dead because of sin," {Rom 8:10}. We would say, "The body is dying because of sin," but the apostle looks on to the end and says that it is as

good as dead already. We all agree with this. We all must die, we say. In this temporary state before the resurrection, the body is the seat of sin, or *the flesh* – this evil principle of self-centeredness in each of us. Therefore, *the flesh* is going to be with us for life. We shall never escape it until that wonderful day of the resurrection from the dead. The body is dead because of sin, and we live with it, therefore, for life.

But the body, soul and spirit of man are inextricably tied together. No one can understand this. Where does your soul live in your body? Do you know? No, but you know that you have a soul, though no one can locate it in the body. The relationship between the body, soul and spirit is beyond our comprehension. But because they are so inextricably tied together, *the flesh*, linked to the body, touches the whole man. It is important to see this. This means that the devil can influence us, in the body, in the soul, and in the spirit. He has access to the whole man through the channel of *the flesh*.

Put another way, we are subject to the influence of these world rulers of present darkness through our mind, our feelings, and our deeds, through our intelligence, our emotions, and our will – that which we choose to do or say – which, of course, is another way of describing our deeds.

We need to understand how this works:

- Through the channel of the mind, the intelligence, the devil makes his appeal to human pride. We regard our reason as the greatest gift God has given to man – and not without justification. Obviously it is our ability to reason, to hold abstract concepts and relate them one to another, which makes us superior to the animals and separates us from the rest of the lower creation. We take pride in this ability to reason. It is through appeal to our pride that the devil influences us along the channel of the mind.
- Through the emotions, he works on our fears. Emotion is really our most human characteristic. It is not true that basically we are rationally-governed beings. We like to think it is through our logic and reason that we govern ourselves, but it can easily be demonstrated that this is not true. We are really governed by our emotions, our urges, our desires, our deep-seated, sometimes subconscious wants – our

instincts, if you like. It is through these that the devil makes his appeal to us by playing on our fears. We are so afraid we will miss out on life in some way, or will be hurt by some sacrifice for God's sake.

- In the realm of deeds, or practical matters, the devil makes his appeal to pleasure, for the body is essentially sensuous, i.e., it is designed by God to respond to stimuli. We learn early in life that there are certain stimuli which are very pleasurable, while others are unpleasant. We learn to seek the pleasant and reject or avoid the unpleasant. So the body is constantly seeking after that which thrills or excites or pleases in some way, and turning away from that which hurts or injures or causes some degree of unpleasant reaction. Thus the devil makes his appeal through the realm of our deeds.

See how accurately this is illustrated by the story of Eve in the Garden of Eden. We are told that when she saw that the fruit was good for food, i.e., it offered the pleasant sensation of eating (the appeal to the body), and it was a delight to the eyes, i.e., it awakened within her a sense of beauty (the appeal to the emotions), and when she saw that it was desired to make one wise (there is the appeal to the pride of mind, the appeal to the intelligence and love of wisdom), she took and ate. These are simply the channels by which men are moved – whether by God or the devil does not make any difference. This is the way men are.

This is the amazing thing about the Bible and the great proof that it is more than a human book. It is clearly the book which understands man. It helps us to understand the way we are, and when we apply it to life we see that it is exactly right, that it describes exactly the way we operate. It is important to notice that both of the forces outside man, which work upon man – God and the devil – move him through these channels:

- The emotions, i.e., the heart;
- The mind, i.e., the intelligence; and
- The will, the power to choose.

“Well,” you say, “if that is the case, if the devil and God both move us by the same channels, then

what is the difference?" The difference is simply this: The devil moves to create an imbalance, an eccentricity, toward extremism. The devil is the original extremist. All extreme groups please take note of that! God moves, however, toward balance, harmony, and beauty. The difference is not how they work, but the direction in which they move.

Here is the greatness of the gospel. Here the gospel is seen in its appeal to the whole man, to the whole of life. That is why it is so obviously divinely given. It does not speak to a part of life only, but it speaks to the whole of life. The gospel touches and explains all of history. It is a world view. It takes in every aspect of the problems of man and of history. It provides a framework for every science, every endeavor to investigate, every advent of history. The gospel is not content simply to adjust a few problems in man. That is what we are always coming to Christ for. We want him to solve this immediate difficult situation in which we find ourselves. But he never stops there. He knows us, and he knows that if he solves this small problem here, or that small problem there, he has touched only a part of our life, and the rest will remain out of balance, eccentric. So the gospel makes its appeal to the whole of man. It touches every part of his life.

You can see this in the life of our Lord. Read the Gospel records and see what a marvelous balance there is in the Lord Jesus, what perfect poise he exhibits in every circumstance. He says things which absolutely challenge the greatest thinkers of his time, and they listen with astonishment to what he says and the insights he exhibits. They say, "Never man spake like this man," {John 7:46 KJV}. But he is not all intellect, making his appeal to the philosopher alone. As you read the record you see that he is also warmly human. He is constantly expressing compassion and human concern. He is easy to live with. Further, he manifests both intelligence and emotionalism in deeds. He is not content merely to feel certain things or to talk about certain great truths, but these find their ultimate expression in practical deeds, in actions, in unforgettable, undeniable events such as the cross and the resurrection. His life is thus grounded in history. That is the glory of our faith.

You can see this appeal to the whole of man in the Scriptures. What a marvelous sanity of balance is maintained in the Bible! The whole man is ministered to – the needs of the soul, the body, and the

spirit – all kept in a delicate equilibrium, with nothing out of balance. Everything is in harmony – the mind, the heart and the will are all moved together. When God gets hold of a man he takes the whole man and begins to touch every part of his life. That is the gospel. Anything less is an incomplete message, a fragment of the gospel.

I am indebted to Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones for pointing out that this is beautifully expressed in one of the familiar hymns of Isaac Watts, *When I Survey The Wondrous Cross*:

When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died...

What is that? Well, that is the mind engaged. When I think about the cross, when I give intelligent consideration to what it means, when I think of all that was involved in that supreme hour when Jesus hung between heaven and earth, when I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died – my intelligence is captured. I see there are deep and marvelous things about this event. And then what? Well, it moves my emotions:

My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

I am moved, my emotions are immediately involved. I have learned that when people talk about the truth of the Word, and it does not move them emotionally, they have not really understood the truth. Truth is designed to reach the heart, to move it, and to involve it. As you go on in this song you see how marvelously the emotions are involved:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small...

Here is a sense of the grandeur of the work of the cross, the extent of it, and the glory of it.

Love so amazing, so divine...

Love does what? Demands! There is the will being impelled to action.

Demands my soul, my life, my all.

The whole man is totally engaged. That is the way God works!

But what does the devil do? Well, he tries to create imbalance – to build up one element of man’s nature at the expense of others, to push us to an extreme, to turn us into persons who are characterized by only one thing. Instead of whole persons, we are grotesque caricatures of men. There are many who take pride in emphasizing one part of their being above everything else. There are the intellectuals – we call them “eggheads,” “brains.” They say there is nothing important in life but the mind, the ability to reason, and they give themselves to the development of this area of their life. As a result they are so absent-minded, so impractical, you can hardly live with them! Because they are out of balance we call them eccentric.

Then there are the emotional people, the ones who say, “Oh, don’t talk to me about intellectual things. I have no patience with those. I want to experience life, to feel it, and to enter into things.” These people are always living on their feelings, their emotions. Sometimes we call them “empty headed” because they never seem to use what is in their heads. These are the people who, when you ask them what they think, say, “How do I know what I think until I’ve heard what I have to say?” Or they are concerned about their introverted feelings, always feeling around inside, endlessly examining themselves. There is nothing wrong with self-examination. It is very much a part of the Christian life. But these are people who never do anything else. They are constantly looking at themselves, examining themselves, wringing their hands, expressing gloom and morbidity over what they find.

Then, of course, there are those who say, “I have no patience with the thinker, or with the feeler. I’m a man of practicality.” “Hardheaded,” we call them, involved only in deeds, concerned only with practical matters. “What do you do?” is always the issue with them. All three of these extremes are wrong. They are unbalanced, they are not what God intends man to be. It is the devil who pushes us into them. It is the devil who takes each of these elements and tries to get us off balance within them.

1. Take the realm of the mind, for instance. It is the wiles of the devil which seek to exalt reason to the exclusion of faith. Faith is a function of the emotions, the soul. That is why faith is the most human characteristic of man – because it

is a function of the soul, that element of man which is our basic motivator. That is why everyone can exercise faith. You are not human, you are not even alive, if you cannot exercise faith. But the devil tries to move from a balance in this area to an exaltation of reason by appealing to our pride. We love to think of ourselves as logicians, who move logically from one thought to another. We justify everything we do on the basis that it is a logical development of a certain premise which we have taken. But this exaltation of reason opens the door to error and deceit.

One of the great examples of this, which we heard a good deal about in the past, was in the appearance of the book, *Honest to God*. This book has bothered many Christians, and rightly so, and has aroused much controversy and discussion both in the religious world and in the world of intellectualism. What is its thesis? It was written by a bishop of the Church of England. He is simply saying that the Bible, as it is and has been for centuries, is too primitive. It no longer makes its appeal to “grown-up man,” to “man come of age.” All these descriptive phrases make their subtle appeal to the pride of the intellect. “Man come of age,” “Twentieth century man!” The Bible, the author says, offends the integrity of modern man, strains his credulity. We can no longer accept it as a historical record, we can no longer view it that way. It is but the attempt on the part of the early church to express things in mythical form. These things did not really happen, but are reported as though they happened in order that we might get the great truth behind them. Man “come of age” does not worry about the form in which truth comes, but with the truth itself. This is his thesis. Therefore, “man come of age” needs to have a new concept of God. Man needs to understand God in a different light. What is this new concept? What is this amazing insight into which mature man has at last come, through the difficult struggle of the ages, having finally grown up and now being able to see something new about God? What is it? Well, it is that God is no longer the Father, as our Lord Jesus pictured him (which he ridicules as “the Old Man in the Sky” concept). God is not a Father, in that sense. The new idea is that God is the

“Ground of our Being.” “Ah,” he says, “if you really want to be an intelligent man, if you want to understand what this whole business of Christianity has been driving at all along, then move on to this new concept of God – he is the Ground of our Being!” The whole book develops this theme as a revolutionary advance in theological thinking.

The fact is, this is the most primitive knowledge about God possible. Turn to the story of the Apostle Paul’s journey to the center of intellectualism of his day – the city of Athens – and read his great address to the Athenians on Mars Hill. As he walked around the city he found it saturated in superstition. He found evidences of a superstitious, ignorant, pagan faith everywhere he went – even finding an altar that was inscribed ‘To The Unknown God.’ He said to them, “It is the God whom you ignorantly worship that I have come to declare to you,” {cf, Acts 17:23}. He started on that level. He said, “Look, you know yourselves that God does not dwell in temples made of stones – not the God who made the heavens and the earth and all things that are in them. Your own poets have recognized the fact that God is not far from anyone of us, for ‘in him we live and move and have our being,’” {cf, Acts 17:24-28}. They already knew that much about God. That is the simplest level of faith – primitive faith, the faith which is the result of an ignorant searching and groping after God.

This book shows how cleverly the devil succeeds in pushing the mind of man, through an appeal to his pride, out to what he thinks are new advances, but what are nothing but the simplest, most primitive understanding of God.

2. Again, in this realm of the mind, the devil is constantly trying to create doubt. It is here he plants his heresies and incites false teaching. False teaching is always an extreme position, an exaggeration of one particular aspect of truth. You can take all the false teaching that is present in the world today, compare it with the Bible, and you will see that it is simply taking some aspect of truth and blowing it up out of proportion – extremism. That is always the devil’s maneuver, his favorite method of working – to push to an extreme.

He does it even about himself. He tries to make people believe there is no devil. He works wily that way. What is most important when you are trying to capture some wild animal? Concealment. You try to hide yourself; you do not want to be seen. This is what the devil does. He persuades people that there is no such thing as the devil. Then he is perfectly free to do exactly what he wants to do with humanity. But if someone wakes up to that and refuses to take that position, then what does he do? Well, he comes and says, “You’re perfectly right! Of course there is a devil. You know it and I know it. But my power, my cunning, my strategy and my willness are so great that you had better give all your time and thought to efforts to overcome me!” Thus he pushes over to another extreme which will lead on into superstition, voodooism, and all the other extremist positions in that direction.

With Christians, the devil works this way in the realm of the mind. He gets us overconcerned in certain points of theology. There are those Christians who pride themselves on being Bible students and who know all the ins and outs of theology. They wander through all the dark woods of theological differences and climb the icy peaks of Mt. Everest doctrines, such as predestination and the decrees of God and such things. For them, all that matters is doctrine. Or perhaps it is prophecy, of Bible numerics, i.e., the numbers of the Bible. They get so involved studying the numbers of the Bible that they end up hiring a computer to study their Bible with. Extremism! That is the devil’s action, that is his way.

3. Take the realm of feelings. Here is a prolific area of satanic attack. We are so used to believing our feelings. From babyhood we have been used to reacting to the way we feel and accepting the way we feel as a legitimate and accurate description of the way things are. Nothing could be more foolish. There is nothing that is more uncertain and more unrealistic than our feelings. Most of the time they do not relate to reality at all because they are subject to so many influences.
 - The devil moves some Christians to live on a plane of exhilaration, of constant joy.

When they get together their meetings are a riot of handclapping, shouting and religious joy – or perhaps more accurately, a religious jag.

- Others he pushes to the opposite extreme. They think to express happiness as a Christian marks them as sinful. They are all gloom and introspection, morbidity.
- Or he leads people to shift from one to another – one time they are up and the next moment they are down, one day they are on top and the next day, because of their feelings, they are down in the depths and the troughs. They live on an emotional teeter-totter. If this describes you then you have already succumbed to the wiles of the devil.

This is what the devil wants us to do, this is what keeps us defeated. He gets some exercised about being concerned and showing compassion to the point that they are acutely anxious all the time, filled with worry and fretful complaint. But when they see that is wrong, then the devil blandly seeks to push them over to the other side and they become callous and cynical, not caring for anybody. The devil always makes his appeal in this realm to our fears, while God makes his appeal to faith. From faith comes hope and love, but the devil pushes to the opposite. He wants us to give way to our fears. The one thing Jesus said over and over again to his disciples was, “Fear not. Be not fearful, be not anxious, be not troubled.” Why? Because, “I am with you,” he said. From fear comes despair, the opposite of hope, and hate, the opposite of love. That is what the devil is after. If you give way to fear, you will soon be discouraged and defeated. If you give way to defeat you will begin to hate, and then the devil will have accomplished his purpose. He has destroyed, he had ruined, he has laid waste that which God loves and desires to bless.

4. Take the realm of deeds. Here again the devil is constantly at work seeking to get us involved in doing things. Ah, but we want to have fun when we do things, we want pleasurable things

and so he gets some to seek a continual round of something new, something exciting. We have to be constantly satisfied with some exciting activity. The devil pushes others in the other direction. All they want is the same thing, over and over again. They get into a rut. Traditionalism, they call it, and they defend it. They say, “These people that are forever running after new things! Not for me. I want the same thing for breakfast every morning, for lunch every day, for supper every night. I come home at the same time, I read the same page of the same paper at the same hour of the day.” Everything is the same.

God never intended life to be lived that way, or the other way. God’s will for man represents a great highway right through the center of life where the whole man is ministered to. That is where the Lord Jesus walked and that is where the Scriptures take us, if we walk by them.

This is but the merest survey of this subject today. I cannot possibly cover all the bewildering variety of ways the devil can influence us, and attack us. I have said almost nothing about his attack through the world, with its illusions, its allures, and its pressures to conform – “Everybody does it, you know. This is the ‘in’ thing to do.” The devil gets us that way. But that is why we have the Scriptures, that is why the Word of God is given to us – that it might instruct us in all the ways of evil. No wonder we do not escape if we will not give ourselves to an understanding of these.

But perhaps I have said enough to make you ask yourself, “Who is sufficient for these things? How can we possibly understand all this? Who can hope to win against such a variety of ways of attack that we don’t even recognize are wrong? Who can even grasp, let alone answer, these subtle and powerful attacks against human life?”

Does it leave you feeling rather discouraged?

If it does, then let me say you have not understood what Paul is saying here. His word to us is:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. {Eph 6:10-11 RSV}

There is a provision made. Perhaps the most healthy attitude we could have in the face of this revelation is to be overpoweringly aware of our sense of weakness.

It is when we recognize we are weak that we're ready to, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might," and we are ready to give intelligent consideration to what that is, and how to do it.

That is where we will start next time: "Put on the whole armor of God." We will look at the means God has provided by which we may stand in the midst of this difficulty, this darkness, this attack upon us, and overcome it and live in victory, unmoved and undefeated. Then, and only then, will we be able to take whatever life can throw at us.

Prayer:

Teach us, Father, to have the humility to admit we have not been doing a very good job on this score, that we have been deceived, have often been deluded, have been upset and trapped, have been snared time and time again by the wiles of the devil. Lord, grant to us a willingness to listen, to give careful, thoughtful, and continued attention to the way of victory provided through Jesus Christ our Lord. He has known all along that we would face this kind of battle and has been trying to tell us but we have been so slow of hearing. Lord, make us attentive to his word. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.