

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

- Ephesians 6:10-13

Some historians have claimed that the 20th century may be remembered in world history as the “age of war.” In fact, more people have died as a result of the wars of the 20th century than have died in all of the other wars in recorded history combined.

But, of course, the pain of war has existed in every age. One researcher has written that since the beginning of recorded history (from around 650 B.C.), there have been over 8,000 recorded peace treaties. Yet in spite of these, only 292 years of our 2,600 years of recorded history, have been *without* war. The same report claimed that since 650 B.C., 14,350 wars have been waged, 3.64 billion people have been killed as a result of military action, and the property destroyed in war would be equal in value to a golden belt that was 3 meters wide and 11 meters thick encircling our planet.

Facing the realities of war and violence occurring all around us, it’s only natural for us humans to yearn for peace. And certainly *we do*. There are lively pacifist movements all around the planet, members of which range from the very young to the very old—from the very poor to the very rich. And of course, we Christians, too, must raise our voices as part of this chorus of humanity crying for peace.

What is Peace?

But what is peace? This is a fundamental question, and one that must be answered at the very beginning.

First, of all, it’s clear that people think about the struggle for peace in different ways. There exists both what we might call an *easy pacifism*, and a *complex pacifism*. An *easy pacifist* is a person who imagines that they don’t really have any enemies. An easy pacifist believes that everyone in the world is fundamentally good and rational, and that if we just talk about our problems enough, we can solve them without having to use violence. A *complex pacifist*, on the other hand, assumes that we do indeed have enemies. A person who is a complex pacifist recognizes that there are deep and possibly insoluble problems with people and in the world, and that fighting these problems is equivalent to fighting a powerful foe.

Clearly, the author of Ephesians is not a easy pacifist. In Ephesians 6, the following is written, “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Clearly, the author of Ephesians believed that we humans *do have enemies*. And since we have enemies, we must *wage* peace, as if we were at war. This, I believe, is the theological bedrock of any Christian struggle for peace.

Second, we must understand that *the enemies we fight are not other people*. The enemies that keep humans from living together peacefully are spiritual enemies—invisible powers which keep people trapped in lives of violence towards themselves and others. In Christian language, we call have a word for all these spiritual enemies—we call these powers the powers of “Satan.”

Why Christians Need to Understand Satan

The word “Satan,” though, is not simply a name. This word is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “enemy.” When, for example, David meets Goliath in battle as recorded in I Samuel 17, Goliath is called David’s “satan”—his *enemy*. What this tells us is that, when we think of Satan, we must not only think of a “being,” as if Satan were simply some kind of evil ghost. We must remember that, by “Satan” we mean *all the things in this world that invisibly work together to prevent God’s peaceable kingdom from becoming a reality for us*. This Satan is our enemy, and as all good soldiers know, we have to know our enemy. If we make a mistake about who our real enemy is, the battle we’re fighting can never be won.

And so, above all, complex Christian pacifists must understand who Satan “is” and what Satan “does.” The Bible says that Satan is a *deceiver* (Rev. 12:9), that he traps people in *snare*s (2 Tim. 2:24-26), and that he *disguises* himself as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:13-14). In the creation story, we see Satan pictured as a “*crafty*” serpent (Gen. 3:1), tempting Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.

Notice that the method Satan used to tempt Eve is the same method Satan always uses to spread destruction and violence around the world—like a good *deceiver*, Satan *mixes a little truth together with a little error*, saying, “You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4-5). Satan didn’t tempt Eve with something she wouldn’t like—he didn’t say to Eve, “Hey, come over here and eat these rotten worms—then, after you eat them, you’ll die.”

No, that’s not his way of operating. He’s *crafty*—he uses things that look good to us—he uses *half-truths*. To confuse and destroy us, Satan presents humans with options in which truth and error are mixed together, making them seem attractive and common-sensical. Remember Satan’s temptation of Jesus—“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread” (Matt. 4:3). Well, if Jesus was hungry, what was the harm in that? It *makes sense*, doesn’t it?

Think about traps for a moment—animal traps, for example. What do you put in a mouse trap if you want to catch a mouse? Cheese, peanut butter, candy—you bait the trap with something the mouse *likes*. If you saw a person trying to bait a mouse trap with a piece of rock or a block of ice, you’d think they were crazy, wouldn’t you? Mice don’t eat ice—they don’t like rocks!

Think of a fisherman—What do fisherman use to lure fish to the hook? They use something that *looks like* a bug or a worm or some other, smaller fish—something that *looks real*, but isn't. Satan is not stupid, he's clever. He's a good trap-setter, and he use things which *look good*, or *look real* to destroy us.

Understanding our Enemy's way of working is important, because it helps us understand why there is little peace in this world. Satan has always used things which look good to us—especially things like *common sense*, our desire for "*justice*," our hunger for "*fairness*"—to deceive us and to trap us in cycles of violence and pain.

The Violence Trap

Violence is, after all, is simply one of Satan's traps. Satan— or as the writer of Ephesians names it, "the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers of this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil,"—these powers have convinced humanity that violence is necessary to our race. Satan has convinced us that violence is natural, common-sensical, and, at times, even good.

Let's do a mind experiment. Imagine for a moment that you were met by a robber, and were held up with a gun to your head. Imagine that the robber said that he was going to shoot you if you didn't give him all of your money. Now imagine that a friend of yours unexpectedly happened to come along, carrying a baseball bat.

Do you think it would be alright for your friend to sneak up behind the robber, and hit him with the bat so that he could prevent you from being robbed? Most of us would say that your friend would be morally justified in doing that. Some of us might even say that he *should* hit the robber—that it's his *duty* to keep you from being robbed.

We think the same way about most criminals—that using violence against them (for example, physically restraining them, punishing them, or even—in the case of capital punishment—killing them) is the only way to prevent *their* violence. We think that, in order to ensure justice, or in order to ensure fairness, we *must*, at times, use violence. This is a perfectly natural way to think—we call it "common sense." It's the fundamental justification for the existence of police and of military forces all around the world.

But think carefully about this for a moment. We humans have obviously been convinced that it's perfectly natural to prevent violence *with violence*. Could this be a *trap*?

To answer that question, we must understand the Hebrew idea of "peace." The Hebrew word, "*shalom*," is often translated "peace." But this word *doesn't* simply mean the absence of violence. The Hebrew noun, "shalom" also has a verb form, "*selem*," which, interestingly means, "to judge." The word "shalom" accordingly, means a peace that comes *from right relationships*—relationships in which both parties are *correctly related* to one another. "Peace," therefore, in the Hebrew, means *a state of safety which arises as a result of right relationships*.

But think about our simple example of the robber and the friend with the bat. If your friend hits

the robber, preventing the robber from killing you or stealing from you, does that result in a “peaceful” situation? If we take the Biblical meaning of “peace” into consideration, we would have to say, “No, of course not!” Even if the robber is stopped, that doesn’t mean that he has a right relationship with you! In other words, *we can stop his violence with violence, but we can’t cure the human relationships which were broken by his crime with violence.* This is the trap.

Satan has convinced us that it’s alright to use violence because sometimes our violence results in *justice*. But what Christians already know is what Jesus always preached—that treating people justly or fairly doesn’t guarantee correct and healthy human relationships!

In the Bible, there are many examples of this principle. For one, consider the story of the woman caught in adultery, recorded in John 8. Jewish religious leaders brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus and asked him whether or not he thought she should be stoned, as the Jewish law commanded. Jesus’ answer was simple—even though “justice” demanded that the woman be stoned, Jesus said, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first one to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7).

His answer, although simple, was profound. Each one of us inherently knows that we would not be happy if every one of our wrongs were justly punished. Each of us knows, deep in our hearts, that we want mercy more than justice. Each of us knows that, for the woman to be truly *healed*, she must not only change her bad habits, but she must also receive mercy from others around her, not simply justice.

The Jewish religious leaders in this story were trapped in a typical cycle of violence. They assumed that “justice” demanded stoning the adulteress woman. But Jesus’ response broke the cycle of violence by asking the more important question—not a question which assumed the priority of justice, but rather, a question which assumed the priority of *right relationships*. Jesus knew that these Jewish leaders didn’t truly care about healing the broken relationships which occurred as a result of the woman’s mistakes. *Relationships didn’t matter to them*—only their so-called “justice” mattered to them.

The world system we live in—a world system ruled by Satan—relies on violence and on the priority of justice as a way to solve its problems. We humans have convinced ourselves that using violence is necessary. Of course, part of this is true. Sometimes bad people cannot be restrained without the use of force. But remember! Part-truths and half-truths are a typical ploy of Satan. The half-truth that “violence is necessary” ignores Jesus’ fundamental teaching. Jesus Christ always said that humans’ most important problem is a problem *within the human heart* which inclines us to prefer justice to mercy; which inclines us to think that pursuing justice is more important than trying to heal our broken, human relationships.

The world system we’re imprisoned in teaches us that it’s perfectly fine to restrain people without healing them. This system can protect people from some physical harm, but it cannot give people the tools necessary to build truly healthy human communities. With half-truths, this system confuses humans into thinking that violence is a good and ordinary thing when, in fact, the easy use of violence is simply a sign that we humans have forgotten what the most important questions are, and we do not know how to restore

our broken relationships with one another.

Fundamentally, this is why the world cannot find peace. The world cannot find peace because it is entrapped by Satan. This trap renders most of us incapable of criticizing the cycles of violence we live in. The world cannot find peace because human beings worship common sense, which always prioritizes justice over mercy, rather than paying attention to the un-common teachings of Jesus Christ. The world cannot find peace because the world has not yet taken the Word of Christ seriously—the Word that says, “all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:52). Jesus was not deceived—he knew that this was a trap.

And so, what does it mean to wage peace? First, it means *knowing our enemy*. Our fight is *not* with other people. Our fight is with a diabolical power which keeps us killing each other. Second, it means *striving with all our might to overcome our enemy's power*. We battle for the hearts and minds of people. We fight to replace the desire for vengeance with the desire to show mercy. We fight to help people forget past offenses which would tempt them to harm their neighbor. We fight to empower people to heal their human relationships rather than simply to restrain the spread of evil.

These are truly monumental tasks—warlike in proportion. This is the battle Christ himself fought. That's precisely why, if we care to pursue peace at all, we must do it with Christ-like single-mindedness, and with all our might *we must wage it*.