

The Final Thing That Must Be Told
June 3, 2018
Romans 16:17-20

“17 I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. 19 Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. 20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.” (Romans 16:17-20)

One of the key figures of the Meiji Restoration in Japan was a samurai named Ryoma Sakamoto, and when Ryoma was 19, he left his home in Tosa Province and traveled to Edo to receive training as a swordsman, and as he was leaving his father handed him a letter in which he wrote three rules to live by.

Rule number one, do not forget that your main duty is your training. Rule number two, do not become preoccupied with your tools. Rule number three, do not let your passions make you forget your duty to your country. There must have been many things this father wanted to tell his son who was not yet a full-fledged samurai. But Ryoma's father poured his heart into these three rules. Here we see a parent's concern for a child who was leaving home for the first time.

We have been going through the Letter to the Romans. This letter was written by Paul to the believers of the church in Rome, and so far we have seen how Paul was especially concerned for the believers who were still weak in their faith. And as he approached the end of his letter, he knew that he had to write down those final words of caution to the believers.

Paul had the discernment to know that there are people we should embrace and those we must watch out for. As we have seen in his letter to the Romans, we know how Paul patiently and lovingly embraced those who struggled with human weaknesses. But the people he warns us against are those who cause division in the church, and those who will hurt or make others stumble through their selfish behaviors.

We can tell by the way Paul wrote this warning that it is based on his own experiences, and that he has witnessed first-hand the damage and hurt caused in the churches he had planted by the kind of people he warns us about.

The church is a gathering of believers who serve Jesus as Lord, but Paul says that instead of serving Jesus, these people serve their own appetites. They serve their own appetites. This means that they only come to church to serve their own desires, and they deceive those who are genuinely seeking to know Jesus and to walk with Him.

They draw people away from the Gospel and away from Jesus, and they cause division and make people stumble, but their words and actions may not always appear harmful at first. In the garden of Eden, the serpent said to the woman “...God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). With these smooth words of the serpent, mankind was lured into sin.

Similar to Ryoma's father who gave him rules to live by, when my children were little I gave them the

rule of never following a stranger. Needless to say, there are countless crimes targeting young children that are happening every day. Sometimes my phone will ring and when I check to see what it is, it's a child abduction alert and a message is displayed with the license plate number and make of the vehicle of the abductor.

This is the kind of world we live in, so even if it sounds like I'm only trying to scare them, I would tell my children how dangerous it is out there and that if they are not careful, they may never be able to see their parents again. And I would test one of them by asking "What do you do if a stranger walks up to you and says 'get in my car, I have a Disney princess doll that I want to give you'?" She would think for a second and say, "I would tell them 'no, I don't want to go'". Then I will say to her "Yes, that's the right answer".

Then I ask another child "What do you do if a stranger comes to you and says 'get in my car, I got some ice cream for you'?" and he replies, "Um, um, I would go with him!" So I would have tell him over and over to not get into a stranger's car. In this way I have to teach my children to watch out for these kind of people.

To tell you the truth, I don't really want to have to tell them these things. I'm basically teaching them to be suspicious of everyone. But unfortunately, the reality of the world we live in today makes it necessary for us to warn our children this way. Because we love our children, as parents we have to protect them from those who seek to harm them.

In the same way Paul felt the need to warn the church he loved before closing his letter and instructed them to watch out for those who seek to deceive them "by smooth talk and flattery".

And this warning is not just for the church in Rome during Paul's time, but it is also a warning for the church today and to each one of us. Our hope is that the Word of God reaches as many people as possible that we may live and grow together by the Word. But for this to happen, it is also necessary for us to protect the church.

Jesus said that He has come to this world to call sinners (Matthew 9:13). This means that the church is open to anyone and everyone. But if there are those who try to manipulate the church to fulfill their own desires, and by doing so cause others to stumble and be hurt, Paul says that we must take actions against such people.

And in verse 20 Paul wrote, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you".

Here Paul is saying that many of the conflicts that happen among us are in essence a struggle against Satan. Paul also mentions this in Ephesians 6:12 where he wrote, "12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms".

In the New Testament (Rev. Okura is citing the Japanese Colloquial Bible) the word "devil" appears 37 times, and the name "Satan" 36 times. In the Bible, Satan has been given many titles including "the enemy", "the evil one", "the prince of this world", "the tempter", "the dragon", "the serpent", and "roaring lion". If I were to write down the thoughts of the devil and his demons, it would go something like this:

“I the devil and my demons love to make accusations. We also love to manipulate you humans so that you spread bad rumors against each other. There's nothing more entertaining than this. We want humans to doubt the goodness of God. We love to make you believe that God doesn't care about you. We want you to think that you are your own god. We know how deeply God loves humans, so there is no greater delight than to sow suspicion and indifference in your hearts.

“But God has foiled one of our plots. He called the Jews to be His chosen people, and ever since the time of Abraham, we have tried to wipe away the people of Israel. For thousands of years we have attempted to annihilate them. And whenever we thought we have devastated them, it ended up being temporary because God always restored everything. Sometimes we would appear to be winning, but to this day we have never been completely successful.

“But the definitive moment came when God's only Son Jesus went on the cross and gained complete victory over us. We admit that initially, we were happy to see Christ being crucified. But it was the fulfillment of a prophecy recorded in Genesis: God said, 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel' (Genesis 3:15).

“We did indeed strike the heel of Christ by nailing Him to the cross. But this was not enough to defeat Him, because Christ died then rose again. Not only that, but by granting forgiveness, He saved you humans from sin, which is the root of all your problems, and in exchange of death and despair, He gave you eternal life. This dealt a fatal blow to our plans, and we have been rendered completely powerless ever since.

“And as it is written in Genesis, Christ who has risen and is seated at the right hand of God, will return on the last day to crush our heads. We fully understand that this day is coming. The Book of Revelation describes our final days in detail, and we are fully aware of our approaching demise.

“Therefore our time is limited. One day we will be completely destroyed. So until that day, we will attack you humans with all our might. We at least are smarter than you. We have full knowledge of what your weaknesses are and how to make you stumble. Until our time comes, we will deceive and confuse as many of you as possible and pour all of our resources into pulling you away from God.

“We will make you believe you that there is no such thing as a right or a wrong in this world. We will make you believe that what you see with your eyes is all there is. We will make you think that marriage is just an inconvenience and not worth the trouble. We will convince you that faith is unnecessary and should not be a priority in your life.

“And so far our strategy has been bearing much fruit and we see hatred, anger, disbelief, and deception all around the world. We enjoy watching the spectacle of families being broken, churches in chaos, and nations and ethnic groups fighting against each other. It would be much better for you if you just turn back to God, but much to our amusement, you humans continue to push Jesus out of your lives and live in self-indulgence!”

Dear brothers and sisters, every day we are under attack by this devil. But there is no need to fear. Paul encourages us by saying, “13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In

addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people" (Ephesians 6:13-18).

Each day we must put on this armor and live with awareness of the fact that we are in the presence of this enemy. But whenever I talk about Satan and his attacks, I also remind people that when we fall into sin, Satan's attacks are not always to blame. If all sin was to be blamed on Satan's attacks, it would mean that the sins we commit are not our own fault. This would lead us into a false belief that invoking phrases like "get behind me Satan" or "get out demon" would solve all of our problems. But in reality, this is not the case.

James also reminds us about this where he says "14 ...each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. 16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters" (James 1:14-16).

To solve a problem, the root cause of that problem must be identified. If we fail to identify the real cause, the problem will remain. If we blame all of our problems on Satan's attacks without ever stopping to search our own hearts, and if a problem is in fact caused by what's in our hearts and not Satan's attack, then that problem will continue to be unresolved. And the one who enjoys this the most is Satan.

So it is not enough to just say "get out Satan!", but with that we must pray and ask "Lord, please cleanse this heart of mine. Have mercy on me, a sinner, and protect me from this temptation I'm facing".

And I want you remind you again; as I've stated earlier, Jesus gained complete victory over Satan's power through His crucifixion and resurrection. And at the same time, He offers us complete forgiveness for the sin within our hearts.

Written by author and theologian C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is probably the most famous children's book in the world. The book has also been made into a hit movie. The main character in the story is a lion named Aslan, who is the son of the emperor of Narnia. In the story, Aslan is executed in place of a human child who committed an act of betrayal. After the death of Aslan, the Witch begins unleashing her evil power. But as the world seems to be overtaken by evil, Aslan comes back to life to destroy all the evil forces and the story ends with Aslan's complete victory (this scene is one of the highlights in the movie).

Needless to say, C.S. Lewis wrote this story with Aslan as Jesus Christ. Jesus indeed rose from the dead. And although evil is still rampant in this world, when the end comes, Jesus the Son of God will destroy every form of evil and all will see God's power. This is clearly written in the Bible.

As I mentioned earlier, Satan already knows about this. That is why until that day, he will do everything he can to try to bring us down. It is said that a bear is most violent when it's wounded and in the same way, the powers of evil will come at us with all they got because they know their end is approaching. They will try to destroy our families. They will try to manipulate our marriages. But above all, the thing Satan hates the most is the church, a place where people come together in the name of Jesus Christ.

In Acts 20, Paul said to the church in Ephesus: “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

Paul says that these wolves “will not spare the flock”. They will be ruthless like a boxer who mounts on top of an opponent who is already knocked out and continues throw punches. We must stand firm against these powers of evil. We as individuals and as a church must put on the full armor of God.

We must be aware that we are constantly in the presence of our enemies. But there is no need to shrink back in fear. Because the One who is with us is infinitely more powerful than these forces of evil. Satan does not have victory over this world. It is Jesus who has victory over the world. And if we trust in Jesus and walk with Him, we too can live in Christ’s victory.

“4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” (1 John 5:4-5)

Even in this world where Satan is still active, we can have victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus will shine His light on our hearts and help us become more like Him. Let us fix our eyes on this hope we have in Him.

From here we will go out into the world. When Jesus sent His disciples to go to the towns, He said to them, “Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3).

It may be dangerous for us lambs to go out on our own. But we have a Shepherd who is always right beside us. Our Lord Jesus is the Shepherd. As long as He is with us, there’s no need to be afraid of the wolves. Even when we walk through the darkest valley, we need not fear, because He is with us. He will give us rest in green pastures, and lead us beside still waters.

Let us pray.