

Disarming The Enemy

Acts 3:1-11

Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. ² And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; ³ who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. ⁴ And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." ⁵ So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and anklebones received strength. ⁸ So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God. ¹⁰ Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."

The Great Awakening was ignited in New England in 1734 under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards. As a student and practitioner of revival in the church, Edwards was familiar with many of the ways the devil seeks to oppose the work of the Holy Spirit.

In one of his writings, "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," Edwards outlined the devil's strategies to halt advancement of the kingdom of God. Any revival of godliness and spiritual power, he said, "would automatically produce a wave of opposition."

Edwards proposed five ways in which the devil attempts to halt God's work:

Satan rages against any fresh work of God.

Some people are misinformed and spread falsehoods about this new work.

Some people are offended because they have not personally experienced the renewing work.

Some people are jealous when they are not used as instruments in this new work.

Some people are outraged because the revival confirms principles they cannot embrace.

In Acts 4:1-22 we see Edward's five principles played out in the life of the early church. Satan tried his best to stop the fragile Christian movement at its inception, instigating external persecutions upon the church as well as promoting internal dissension and confusion within it.

Today, millions of people are coming to Christ as a great move of God's Spirit sweeps the world. But as we are witnessing this movement, we are also seeing much evidence of intensified *spiritual warfare*.

The enemy seems to be mobilizing massive forces to counterattack God's work throughout the world. But if Christians learn to expect these five strategies of the devil and understand them, we will be prepared to disarm his assaults when they come. Therefore, look with me as we look at these five points as offered by Jonathan Edwards.

1. Satan rages against any fresh work of God. Acts 3-4 records the account of a *miraculous healing* that brought *explosive church growth* and *eventual persecution*. A man more than 40 years old, who had been crippled from birth, was instantly healed by the words of the apostles.

Why did this make Satan so upset? Because the *lame man's healing* and *Peter's ensuing message* added at least 2,000 people to the church (Acts 2:41,4:4).

This was not just one isolated instance of healing. It was the beginning of a movement. When such large numbers of people become zealous for Christ, Satan takes notice and begins to rage.

Theologian Richard Lovelace has described the devil's tactics in terms of ACCUSATION and INFILTRATION. I quote: "He may attack the subjects of revival directly and internally with despair and discouragement. He may plant lies, suspicion or stereotypes in the minds of unbelievers or unrevived Christians so they will reject the work of God and attack its progress. If possible, he will set the leaders of the revival against one another in this way in order to divide and conquer. To create evidence to corroborate accusations, he will ... cause (converts) to run to extremes. Finally, he will sow tares among the wheat in the form of counterfeit revivals, leading people to confound these with the real work which is in progress and to discredit it."

There is a common testimony among those who have led their churches into a spiritual awakening and in a great church growth. The beginning of a *fresh work* always *triggers spiritual warfare*. Many suffer *illness, physical persecution* or *emotional problems*. **Others lose jobs and family members, or experience untimely accidents.** The devil uses any means available to slow down or stop the momentum of affection for Jesus Christ.

How did Satan show his rage in the Acts 3-4 account? First, the enemy stirred up an *emotional reaction in the religious establishment*. The Jewish leaders were "greatly disturbed" by what was going on (Acts 4:2, NIV).

During times of great church growth, it is common for religious leaders to be hostile toward the work of God and encourage distraction. Such people; have little discernment about what is godly

and what is carnal! They are more concerned about *religious respectability* and *tradition*.

Second, Satan incited the religious establishment to throw the leaders of the new work into jail. The term “seized,” suggest Peter and John received rough treatment as they were hauled off to prison (4:3).

Third, Satan vented his rage through the religious leaders as they warned and threatened the apostles (4:17-21). *Physical force* would not work, so the Sanhedrin tried *intimidation*.

Verbal abuse is intended to persuade us that human opposition can stop the work of God. This is not true, but our enemy wants us to believe it.

People who are bringing fresh life to the church are often approached with negative gossip, false accusations and outright lies. Therefore, it is important that we learn to recognize this as the discouraging work of the enemy.

2. Some people are misinformed and spread falsehoods about this new work. The religious establishment did not know what was going on, so they had to ask, "By what power or what name did you do this?" (Acts 4:7). These religious leaders assumed *personal power, knowledge* or *piety* had healed the lame man. But, the truth of the matter is that *Peter and John were empowered to minister in Jesus' name*.

Listen to me very carefully, when the renewing presence of God is transforming the church, there will always be uninformed individuals who criticize what is happening. They tend to be trained religious leaders who are not filled with the Spirit, who spend little intimate time with Jesus and who seldom pray in Jesus' name, particularly for someone to be healed. Such people often twist biblical truth to devise "theologically correct" explanations to account for what is happening. But we need to recognize this type of opposition by religious leaders to God's work.

3. Some people are offended because they have not personally experienced the renewing work. According to Bible scholar F.F. Bruce, there is a "scornful emphasis" in the religious leaders' question that says in Acts 4:7, "By what power or name did people like you do this?" **The religious leaders had extensive education and superior positions in the community.** So they assumed that, if God would bless the people through anyone, it would be them.

Our attitudes today can be remarkably similar. Some of us may brag that we have 50 years of Christian experience under our belts when we really have only one year of experience - repeated 50 times.

The power of the Holy Spirit offended first-century religious leaders, and Satan will see to it that it offends every generation like them.

4. Some people are jealous when they are not used as instruments in this new growth. Listen carefully; the problem with the *anointing of the Holy Spirit* is not that it is *too emotional*; the problem is that it is too personal! *The Spirit-filled life is based on our personal willingness to allow God to take control of our very being!!*

5. Some people are outraged because great growth confirms principles they cannot embrace. The healing of the lame man, done in the name of the resurrected Jesus, was contradictory to everything these religious leaders believed and taught. After all, they reasoned, *it could not be right if it contradicted their theology.*

Some people will never believe in the power of the Holy Spirit until they experience it for themselves. And that will be hard, *because it is a matter of walking by faith!!*

F.R. Maltby, in his writings, said Jesus promised His disciples three things: "They would be *absurdly happy, completely fearless and in constant trouble.*" That is still our lot today, as we become involved in the work of Christ.

Ladies and gentlemen, [“we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”](#) Therefore, as God warns us of *Satan's strategies* for resisting God's work, *we should be prepared to expose and counter his assaults when they come.*

If you have never been saved, why not today?

Please stand for prayer.

Father,

Your Word is true. Thank You for your encouraging word for my life. I am comforted knowing I am more than a conqueror! In Jesus' name. Amen.