



# HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH

For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. -Galatians 5:5



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## Spiritual Warfare

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*  
Ephesians 6:12

### The Forgotten Battle

Martin Luther ends his Large Catechism with this exhortation: "They [the parts of the catechism] must all certainly help us to believe, love, pray, and fight against the devil." What a list! If someone were to ask us what are the major things of being a Christian, we might offer the first part of Luther's list: "we believe, love and pray," but it's the last item on Luther's list that ought to get our attention: "fight against the devil."

Our Christian life is a fight, a battle, a wrestling. Luther knew this; he can hardly open his mouth without speaking about the dangers of the devil. For the devil, Luther knew, opposes God and God's Word at every point, so the Christian Church also opposes the devil at every point.

What Luther knew, I'm afraid we have forgotten. We rarely think about the devil. We do not see our Christian lives as a daily battle against the forces of darkness. The trouble is that if we've forgotten the devil, he has not forgotten us. He prowls about daily looking to destroy us, and the less vigilant we are, the more precarious our situation is. This is why the Scriptures urge us to watchfulness.

*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1 Peter 5:8-9)*

### The Enemy, the Battleground

For a quick look at spiritual warfare we will consider Revelation 12, the epic battle in heaven. Here St John is given a glimpse of the spiritual war that spans through history.

*And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. (Revelation 12:1-4a)*

The woman is a symbol of the church. That Baby in her womb is the promised Child, the Messiah. When this woman is pregnant she is a picture of the Old Testament Jewish people who were waiting for the promised birth of the Messiah. But all is not well with this pregnant mother, there is another sign. The red dragon is the devil who, with his demons (the 1/3 of the stars) is there for devour the child.

*And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. (Revelation 12:4b)*

This is the ongoing battle of the devil and the church. The devil fights the church in order to destroy the promised Child. This is important for us to remember, the devil is out to destroy Jesus. Any place the devil finds Jesus is where he focuses his attacks. So we would expect the Christian church, the Christian home and the Christian's conscience to be the front lines of the battle with the devil.

*She gave birth to a male child (Christmas), one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne (Ascension), and the woman (the church) fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. (Revelation 12:5-6)*

In this one sentence we have the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus. What follows in the verses is the Lord's heavenly battle against the devil.

### The Real Battle is Already Won

When the Lord Jesus ascends to heaven He finds the devil there doing what he is wont to do: accusing Christians of their sin. "Satan", after all, is a Hebrew word which means "accuser". The Bible shows us this example of the devil standing before God accusing the Lord's people of their sins (remember Job 1). But now the Lord Jesus ascends into heaven having spilled His blood on the cross and risen from the grave. Jesus, in His death, has made the accusations of the devil worthless. It is no wonder, then, that when our Lord ascends into heaven the devil has to be cast out.

*Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the*

*dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God." (Revelation 12:7-10)*

This is one of the most beautiful passages in all of the Scriptures. The devil, the accuser, the one who stood before God with a list of our sins has been tossed out of heaven. He no longer stands before God to accuse you of your sins. There is nothing to accuse; your sins are all forgiven.

When speaking about spiritual warfare we must remember this: that battle has already been won. The Victor is Jesus, and His cross was the devil's undoing (see 1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14). We see this in the next verse which outlines the weapons of our battle and the victory that comes with them.

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" (Revelation 12:11-12)

The devil's time is short; his loss is assured; his defeat is at hand. In fact, dear friends, his defeat is at our hands, as long as our hands hold the right weapons. And what are these weapons with which we overcome the devil? The blood of the Lamb and the Word of Witness.

### **The Weapons of War**

The first weapon is the blood of the Lamb, that is, the blood of Jesus. It is His blood spilt on the cross that atones for all our sin. His blood covers all our guilt and shame. His blood makes peace with God. We have His blood covering us when we believe His promise of forgiveness and trust that His death saves us. And even more, He gives His blood into our very mouths in the Lord's Supper. There He says to us, "Take and drink, this is the blood of the New Testament, shed for you for the remission of sins." When we come to the Lord's Supper we are fighting the devil, overthrowing his kingdom of darkness, because at the Lord's altar we are being given the most precious treasure in all of the universe, the very blood that won our salvation.

The second weapon we are given in the Word of Witness, that is, the Scriptures. Martin Luther liked to think of the Bible as fumigation for the devil. "Certainly you will not release a stronger incense or other repellent against the devil than to be engaged by God's commandments and words, and speak, sing, or think them. For this is the true 'holy water' and 'holy sign' from which the devil runs and by which he may be driven away." [Martin Luther, Preface to the Large Catechism]

The Word of God is the "Sword of the Spirit", the weapon given to Christians to fight back the devil's lies. The devil tells us that he has our best interest at heart. The Bible tells us that he is a liar and murderer and thief. The devil tells us that we are good people. The Bible tells us rightly that we are sinners that desperately need God's mercy. The devil tells us that God hates us, or doesn't care about us, or that He's out of forgiveness because we keep on sinning. The Bible tells us that our heavenly Father is merciful and long-suffering, and that Jesus has paid the price for the sins of the entire world. As we take up the Scriptures the devil is beaten back, and we are given the joy of our salvation.

### **Therefore, Stand**

When St Paul encourages the church in Ephesus to take up their fight against the devil, he does not order them to storm the gates of hell. They are simply to stand (see Ephesians 6:13-17). This is true for us in our spiritual warfare against the devil. We rejoice in the death of Jesus, the forgiveness of all our sins, the end of the devil's accusations, and, armed with the Lamb's blood and His Word, we stand with good consciences ready for the Lord's return for us. Amen.