

1. One of America's great storytellers was radio broadcaster Paul Harvey. His daily broadcast, *The Rest of the Story*, surprised listeners with unknown tales about famous American figures. But Paul Harvey also offered critical commentary about the state of American culture. In one such commentary in 1965, he wrote an essay titled "If I Were the Devil," intended to be a warning to America against the moral decay and societal collapse so apparent to him. His approach in the essay was to describe how the devil would attack our nation. One part of the essay states, "With flattery and promises of power I would get the courts to vote against God and in favor of pornography. Thus, I would evict God from the courthouse, then from the schoolhouse, then from the Houses of Congress. Then in his own churches I'd substitute psychology for religion and deify science. If I were Satan, I'd make the symbol of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle. If I were Satan, I'd just keep doing what I'm doing."

2. People today are struggling all around us. Many aren't asking big questions about life. They just want to make their paychecks go a little further. Just want health insurance so their children are covered. Want to get along with their families. They struggle against depression, cancer, addiction, or guilt over past sins. They just want a day when life isn't a constant struggle. But it's not just "those people." Life is a struggle for each and every one of us. Hardship and heartache are part of the daily struggle that we all face in this fallen world.

As great as those struggles are in our lives, we face an even greater struggle that isn't against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil at work. There really is a great cosmic struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan. Paul describes the struggles Christians face with such evil as a wrestling match. This match is hardly the fictional drama of pro wrestling, but more the sly deceptions of a vicious but undetected enemy. This evil foe is behind the broken relationships and broken hearts that fall into his traps.

Satan attacks us so often without even being noticed as we're easily led astray. Though he may be shrewd, there's nothing weak about the one of whom Martin Luther said in his great hymn, "On earth is not his equal." The apostle Peter pictures the old evil foe as a roaring lion, while our Lord describes him as the father of all lies. The warning from St. Paul is that our struggle is not just paying the bills or facing health issues, as intense as those are, but rather facing this fierce enemy who seeks only our destruction. How can we possibly stand against Satan and the dark forces of evil?

3. The only way we can stand against Satan is by knowing we don't have the strength within us. Left to our own devices, we cannot stand. We're easy prey for the devil's snares of lies and lust. In our weakness, we easily stumble into his traps of selfishness and greed. We're not equipped to battle against this fierce enemy. But our strength comes from the Lord. While our text is often translated, "Be strong in the Lord," it's really better understood as "be **strengthened** in the Lord."

Our strength isn't found in our knowledge, our efforts, or even our faith, but in Christ alone. It's in Christ and His cross that we're strengthened for the struggles against the devil's wiles that we face each day.

4. Even though our Lord Jesus came in humility and weakness, He alone is our refuge and strength. He's the one who conquered sin by keeping the Law perfectly in our place. He's the one who defeated death by His triumphant death and resurrection from the grave. This Son of Man came to crush Satan's head and open for us the way of everlasting life. Your strength comes from the one who is mighty to save. It's like Paul prayed for the Ephesians, that they be "strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (3:16).

It is the strength that comes from God alone that enables you to stand. Even in a world of "COEXIST" bumper stickers and intolerant demands for tolerance, the people of God are able to stand for and by the truth of God's Word. We're able to stand against the devil and his schemes. That's because we have put on the new man, Christ Jesus, in the waters of Holy Baptism. When Paul calls us to put on the full armor of God, the different pieces of armor that he proceeds to describe are all given in the one garment we put on in Holy Baptism. Clothed in Christ and His strength, we are able to stand against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, and against the spiritual forces of evil.

Strengthened by the Holy Spirit at work through the Word, we can stand firm in the Lord. Our spiritual knees may sometimes be wobbly, and our resolve may at times be weak. What's more we may be filled with fear because of all the enemies who attack us. We may be full of doubts and uncertainty standing against the devil and all the forces of evil. But the One who is in you, Jesus Christ the crucified and risen Lord, is greater than the one who is in the world, that old evil foe. So, you and I can take heart and stand firm with the strength that the Lord gives.

5. Satan and the dark forces of evil will continue to wage war against the children of God. Our life, this side of eternity will still be marred and scarred by an ongoing wrestling with the enemies. We will continue to see Satan at work

even in the courthouses, schoolhouses, state houses, and our houses. But we are strengthened in the Lord as the Holy Spirit strengthens the baptized through His mighty Word. In the Lord's strength and the power of His might, we will not be misled by the devil's lies or fall into his traps. Instead, when the evil day comes, after we have done everything, we are strengthened to stand firm to the end. Amen.