

Strategic Targets

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I live in deer country. When deer season opens, the camo army appears. Work schedules change. Pickup trucks are found in the most unusual places. The gunfire in the morning and evening can sound like an approaching army. Grease paint and fluorescent hats are a common sight mid-morning at the local Hardee's. Deer are cagey and difficult, but they can be brought down by a well-placed shot. It does no good to hit a deer in the tail or the leg or the hind end as it will just scamper off into the woods. If you want to bag a deer, you must hit him in the right spot – the heart or the lungs. Nothing else will do. Only a shot to a very small target area will bring him down.

A good hunter knows where to aim. He knows the difference between an effective shot and an ineffective one.

In the same way, satan is firing his shots, not wildly into the air, but directly at the heart and breath of the church - to those foundational areas that would break her down.

The crosshairs of satan are on the delivery systems of the truths of God's relationship with humanity:

The Word of God

Marriage

Biblical Fatherhood

Providentially, the accuser's efforts will ultimately fail. Jesus said, "I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Satan will be defeated. Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

But, there will be times, as the history of Israel and the church proves, that the people of God will wander as we see in the days of the Judges where "everyone did what is right in their own eyes" (Deut. 12:8, Judg. 17:6, 21:25), and in the days of Samuel, when the "word of God was rare" (1 Sam. 3:1).

These times have always set the stage for evil to have a field day. I believe that our times fall into this category as satan is successfully knocking out major strategic targets.

If you wanted to take over a city, you would first go after the major supply, communications, food, power, water and transportation systems. Blow out the delivery systems and chaos rules.

This is exactly what is happening to the church. The attacks against her are strategic.

The fallout from this strategic attack against the church is producing cataclysmic conditions.

I realize that the preceding words I have chosen are loaded: "blow out," "chaos," "fallout," "cataclysmic." I use these words with careful consideration. I believe that these extreme times, require extreme measures.

One Denominational Response

Our denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, has long been a leader in defending many core Biblical doctrines. Her leadership has recently issued a call to arms regarding these issues, particularly as they relate to the family and Biblical roles within the family. Let me quote from the "Southern Baptist Council on Family Life" which was formed because of the rising concern with breakdown in the family:

America's families are in trouble. Evidence pouring in from every sector of our society reaffirms that simple but tragic statement. Consider the following:

- o One million children a year see their parents divorce (Heritage Foundation)
- o America's divorce rate is now more than double that in 1960
 - o 35% of our nation's children live apart from their biological fathers (U.S. Census)
 - o In the last 40 years, pregnancies out of wedlock have increased 600% (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services)
 - o In less that 40 years cohabitation by unmarried couples has increased almost 1,000% (U.S. Census Bureau)
 - o 32% of all births in 1995 were out-of-wedlock. (Leading Cultural Indicators, Bill Bennett)
 - o Most people now live together before they marry for the first time.
 - o Currently more marriages are terminated by divorce than by death of a spouse.
 - o Less than 40% of married people claim to be very happy (National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago)
 - o 50% of children who do not live with their fathers have in fact, never stepped foot in their father's home (Leading Cultural indicators, Bill Bennett)

In response to rising concern, the Southern Baptist Convention at its 1998 meeting in Salt Lake City Utah adopted an historic amendment to the BAPTIST FAITH AND MESSAGE. This amendment established the Biblical foundation for our understanding of the family and the roles God has ordained for each family member.

But much more was required than a simple statement of conviction and concern! During his report to the Convention as it assembled for its 2000 meeting in Orlando Florida, Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, urged Southern Baptists to take the next step and "save the family." By executive appointment, he created what was then termed the Southern Baptist Convention Committee on Family Life." Next, the "Southern Baptist Council on the Family" was created to recommend strategy to strengthen the family.

The scriptural direction for these actions were identified by the following scripture passages: Exodus 20:14, I Corinthians 6:18-20, Acts 2:46-47, Hebrews 10:25, I Corinthians 12:11-27, I Corinthians 4:2, II Corinthians 8-9, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8.

Effects Far Beyond the Family

These attacks undermine not just the family, but the entire enterprise of the spread of the gospel and the equipping of the saints.

It is true that in every area of attack, there is a profound impact on the family. But, make no mistake about it: what happens in a family, spins out a whirlwind of results reaching to every aspect of the calling of the church as salt and light. Here are a few examples:

* When there is a divorce, it is not just a marriage that ends up on the rocks; evangelism washes up with it. Massive energy is shifted to the wounds of the divorce and the time that could have been given (over lunch and walks and water coolers) to the communication of the precious callings and promises of God is lost. And, disrepute is brought to the name of Christ. God said, "I hate divorce" (Malachi 2:16).

* When men are passive and refuse to take action to personally train the next generation, it is not just their kids that suffer, it is every person those kids meet and every church they attend for the rest of their lives. Imagine millions of children trying to wade through the trials and tribulations of this world unarmed with the Word of God, the "Sword of the Spirit" "hidden in their hearts" (Eph. 6:17, Psalm 119:11). Let's call this what it truly is: a devastating deprivation.

* When men do not rise up and manage their households well, qualifying them to lead the church, "equipping the saints for the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12) suffers, creating a dearth of qualified men. The equipping of the saints suffers because there are too few men across which to spread the workload.

* When our churches are self centered, instead of God centered, it is not just the people in that church who suffer, missionary activity is squelched and the people are not strong enough to face the challenges and potential losses of comfort and money on the mission field.

Here is a summary of the three targets receiving these brutal attacks:

1. The Word of God. This is the rejection of God and His Word of God as the authoritative, sufficient rule of the life for the people of God. Even the churches which claim to believe in inerrancy, have not understood the concept of the sufficiency of Scripture. The church, in its sincere attempt to become relevant to society, in order to save the lost, has unwittingly rejected God and His Word and has heaped upon itself programs and forms that not only cannot be found in the Bible, but they also work to secularize, immobilize and trivialize. These modern ways often sweep her beauty and strength away. Our only hope; our only source of joy; our only Treasure – God – has been swept aside for a "theology" of pragmatism. Or, perhaps better called, ecclesiological pragmatism.

2. Marriage: This is the breakdown of marriage and the resulting fracturing of the next generation and the resulting disfiguring of the evangelistic example of the love of God. When a marriage dissolves a number of hellish effects are multiplied. The foundational order that God put in place for society includes a husband who loves his wife as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). When a man allows the dismemberment of his marriage, he has committed a crime against the love of God, derision toward the institutions of God, and weakness for future generations.

3. Biblical Fatherhood: This is the bypassing and neutralizing (spiritually castrating) of men as the leaders of their homes. Our modern churches are implicitly structured to bypass God's primary delivery system of the truth. Deut 6, Ps 78, Ps 145, Eph 6. In losing their creation order identity and role, they have lost their virility. They could be heroes of the faith, with righteousness shining from one generation to the next, but they have become mules instead, with their multiplication capability removed. Eph 4:1-11, I Cor 11-14.

These attacks have profoundly affected the structure and philosophy of the modern church facilitating satan's objectives.

C.S. Lewis has captured the situation in his revealing story of "The Screwtape Letters. In the book, Screwtape, an experienced devil, is instructing his underling on how to trap humans.

"One of our great allies at present is the church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the church as we see here spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans". C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

Our churches, in our teaching and structure, have unconsciously and unintentionally become co workers with the enemy.

In this sense, we have become our own worst enemy.

Jesus grieves over the loss of Biblical order in the church. Jesus says "follow me".