

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will focus on a lesson we can learn from a famous criminal. His real name was Charles E. Boles, but he took the name of "Black Bart" to intimidate his victims. He was a much feared criminal and is credited with at least 28 stagecoach robberies between 1875 and 1883. He was so feared that he never had to fire a shot to take money from his victims. His booming voice was so intimidating that virtually everyone cowered in his presence. On at least two occasions he left poetry behind which added another dimension to his mystique.

His first robbery took place on July 26, 1875 in Calaveras County, California. With his face covered by a hood, and brandishing a shotgun, he ordered stagecoach driver John Shine, "throw down the box". To further intimidate the driver, Bart glanced over his shoulder and shouted: "If he dares to shoot give him a solid volley, boys". Seeing what appeared to be rifle barrels pointed at him from nearby bushes, Shine immediately complied. After Black Bart disappeared with the money Shine discovered that the "men with rifles" were actually only carefully rigged sticks that looked like rifles. Bart's first hold up was a success but netted him only \$160.

Interestingly, Bart's last robbery took place on Nov. 3, 1883 in Calaveras County at the same site as his first robbery. Again he wore his hood, which was really only a flour sack with two eye holes. On this occasion, however, 19 year old Jimmy Rolleri was hunting near by while the stage was being robbed. Black Bart, with his shotgun in hand, ordered the driver to unhitch the team to keep them from following him. Also, the strong box was bolted to the floor which also took extra time to remove. These delays provided time for the driver to team up with the hunter and fire several shots at the famous outlaw as he disappeared into the bushes. One bullet hit Black Bart in the hand and following his trail they found a blood stained handkerchief. The wounded crook left his handkerchief behind, hid the sack of gold amalgam in a rotten log, and then hid his shotgun in a hollow tree. He did, however, escape with \$500 in gold coins.

It was the blood stained handkerchief that finally led to the famous outlaw's arrest. Wells Fargo detective, Harry N. Morse, noted that the blood stained handkerchief had a laundry mark "F.X.O.7". He recognized this was the same kind of laundry mark used in San Francisco. After checking with nearly 90 laundries he finally found the right one and discovered that the handkerchief belonged to a man named Boles who claimed to be a mining engineer. Ultimately Boles was arrested and confessed to being the infamous "Black Bart". For some reason Wells Fargo chose to only prosecute him on his final robbery. He was summarily convicted and sentenced to six years in San Quentin. Suffering from deteriorating health, failing eyesight, and going deaf in one ear, the famous bandit was released for good behavior in Jan. 1888. He served only four years of his six year sentence.

In retrospect, Black Bart was not as vicious and dangerous as he appeared to be. He never fired a shot because his shotgun was not loaded. Furthermore, the reason he always robbed stages on foot was because he was afraid of horses. If stage coach drivers had only known what a sissy Bart was, they could have avoided being robbed by simply saying "no" to his booming voice.

There is a lesson we can learn from Black Bart! The devil is also a deceiver and is not nearly as dangerous as he appears to be. In fact, he will flee from those who dare to oppose him.

When Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the Road to Damascus He warned him about the “power of Satan”. Jesus said to Saul: **“I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:17-18).** Yes! Satan does have “power”, but his power comes from deception. Satan has the same kind of power that Black Bart had! They both were deceivers. The work of Satan does not involve real power, but only **“all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9).** Satan is a sissy and cannot do one thing to you without permission from God! That’s why James wrote: **“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (Ja. 4:7).** This is precisely what Black Bart did when somebody finally resisted his deception and dared to shoot at him.

We repeat! Black Bart’s “power” involved deception just like Satan’s “power” involves deception! Using this power of deception Satan sends millions of deceived people to hell. If you are not “double minded”, however, you can have authority over Satan. He is a predator who targets those who are vacillating and weak. If you are strong in the Lord, and wise concerning what is good, and innocent about what is evil **“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:19-20).** The word “crush” in this verse is from the Greek word “suntribo” which historically refers to trampling grapes to make wine. This is how God will trample Satan under your feet if you have the courage to say “no” to Satan and really mean it!

We are to fear God, not the devil! Perhaps Paul’s most successful ministry was in Ephesus which was a stronghold of Satan. The temple of the pagan goddess Diana was there and it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Yet Paul was so successful in Ephesus that the craftsmen who made idols of Diana feared they would go out of business (Acts 19:23-27). In fact, while Paul ministered in Ephesus, in only two short years everyone in Asia heard the Word of the Lord both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10). So the brethren in Ephesus had reason to relate to what Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians: **“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Eph. 6:10-11).** We also need to be strong in the Lord and to put on the whole armor of God.

This is at least one lesson we can learn from the legendary Black Bart!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce