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THE SPIRITS IN PRISON: 1 PETER 3:18-20: ARE SPIRITS IN PRISON ANGELS OR PEOPLE?

By Dr. Warren Prestidge

First, we look at **1 Peter 3:18** in an accurate and unprejudiced translation: “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit ... ” (RSV).

The first sentence is one of the most succinct statements of core Christian faith in the entire Bible. But what does that last part mean? Some earlier scholars held that the “spirit” here is Christ’s divine nature, but modern commentators all recognize that this amounts to reading later theological concerns back into the New Testament. Many hold that Peter is speaking of the survival, with increased vigor, of Christ’s divine (or divine-human) spirit, after the death of his body. It is argued that “flesh” and “spirit” refer to two separable parts of Christ. However, in Greek the expression “made alive” (*zoopoiethis*) can apply only to what has been lifeless, dead, and this is particularly obvious here, where there is a direct contrast to being “put to death” (Greek *thanatotheis*).

Clearly, then, Peter is referring to Christ’s *resurrection*. In the New Testament, the verb *zoopoiein* is used routinely in this sense, as a virtual equivalent to *egeirein*, “to raise up”.¹ As Kelly explains: “Here the contrast ... is between Christ’s death and resurrection ... The verb for ‘make alive’ ... is virtually synonymous with ‘raise from the dead’”²

Furthermore, “flesh” and “spirit” do not refer here to two parts of Christ or of human nature. “In fact the flesh-spirit distinction which we meet in the NT ... is completely OT in inspiration and has nothing to do with the Greek, ultimately Platonic, dichotomy of soul and body ... ”³ Nor is it likely that the “spirit” here is the Holy Spirit, although that interpretation would accord with the resurrection (Rom. 8:11).

Most likely, “flesh” and “spirit” refer to “the whole Christ regarded from different standpoints”.⁴ In fact, they refer to two contrasting planes of existence, earthly and divine, one before Christ’s death, the other after his resurrection.⁵ It was at his resurrection, as Paul says, that Christ “was vindicated in spirit” (1 Tim. 3:16) and “became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45).⁶ Other recent commentators concur.⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield explains: “... it means that, while the body of Christ that was crucified was subject to the frailty and limitations of an ordinary human body, the body that was raised is no longer subject to such limitations ...”⁸ Christ, who once lived and died subject to all the limitations of human existence, now lives on the plane of God Himself.

1 Peter 3:19–20a: “... in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah ...” (RSV).

First, we need to note that *there is no reason to link this proclamation with the preaching referred to in 1 Peter 4:6*. There, the word for “proclaimed” is *euangelidzo*, which certainly means, “to preach the Gospel with a view to conversion,” while here it is *kerusso*, a more general term. And 1 Peter 4:6 makes no reference to “spirits.” Much confusion has resulted from assuming the two passages are talking about the same thing.

Second, given that verse 18 is talking about Christ’s resurrection, there can be no doubt that *this proclamation was made by Christ after his resurrection*, not while he was dead! “In which,” in Greek, could mean “on which occasion,” or “in which mode of existence,” or possibly “in the course of which.” In any case, it naturally implies a journey following the events of verse 18. The way that “he went” (v.19) is picked up again in verse 22 (“has gone into heaven”), after the reference to “the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (v.21), implies that the same post-resurrection sequence is in view. An important parallel is I Timothy 3:16, which envisages Christ appearing to angels after his resurrection, though prior to his being enthroned in glory. Finally, until Christ was raised from the dead, what was there to proclaim? The resurrection is integral to the whole gospel (Col. 2:12-13; 1

Pet. 1:3, 3:21) and to Christ's victory over evil powers (Eph. 1:20-23, 1 Pet. 3:20): "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17)!

Now, *third*, who or what are these "spirits" (Greek: *pneumata*)? Ever since Clement of Alexandria (c.190 A.D.), it has been common to hold that they are the departed spirits of preceding human generations, especially perhaps of the generation of Noah's flood (representing the worst sinners of all). However, this is most unlikely.

(a) Wherever *pneuma* ("spirit") occurs in the Bible without some word or phrase to show that the spirit belongs to human beings,¹⁰ the word almost always means a supernatural angelic being or demon. Examples are: Matt. 8:19, 12:45; Mk 1:23; Lk 10:20; Heb. 1:7, 14; Rev 1:4; etc.¹¹ The same holds true for all Jewish literature written in Greek contemporary with the New Testament. "There is no trace of *pneumata* being used absolutely to connote 'departed spirits.'¹² Now, there is no such qualifying word or phrase here in 1 Peter. The *Living Bible*, the *Good News Bible (TEV)* and the translation of J. B. Phillips are all very misleading here. The Greek does not say, "the spirits ... of those who ... did not obey," but "the spirits ... who did not obey," as in *RSV*, *NRSV*, etc.

(b) Peter does not divide human nature into a body plus a separable "soul" or "spirit" elsewhere. This conclusion is reached independently by both J. N. D. Kelly and E. Best. For example, on 1 Pet. 2:11, Kelly writes: "Here, as in the other passages where he uses it, soul denotes the man himself, considered as a living being or person ..."¹³

So we conclude that these "spirits" are not human at all, but angelic beings (as in 1 Tim. 3:16).¹⁴ This is altogether confirmed by 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6, which refer to rebellious angels, punished by God with imprisonment, just as in 1 Peter 3. Just like 1 Pet. 3, 2 Pet. 2 goes straight on to refer to the time of Noah's flood. Even the number of people saved in the ark is mentioned in both cases! Undoubtedly, all three passages refer to the same incident and surely no one would ever have thought otherwise without the contaminating influence of Platonist presuppositions.¹⁵

The “spirits” to whom Christ preached, therefore, are fallen, rebellious angels.

Fourth, the “scene” of this event is not the world of the dead at all. Despite Is. 24:22, Rev. 1:18 or Apocalypse of Baruch 23:4, the realm of the dead is only rarely described as a prison in Jewish literature. II Peter 2:4 calls the place where these spirits are confined “Tartarus” (translated “hell” in *NRSV*). Now, in Greek literature Tartarus is an abyss beneath the underworld, not for humans, but for fallen immortals. However, we cannot be sure precisely what Peter means. Some Jewish writings have these fallen angels imprisoned in the “depths of the earth” (Jubilees 5; 1 Enoch 10, 88); others, westward in a chaos, or anomalous fiery abyss beyond heaven or earth (1 Enoch 18–21); others, in the second heaven (Testament of Levi, 2 Enoch 7). In the opinion of both Kelly and Fitzmyer, 2 Peter, Jude and 1 Peter all probably refer to the heavenly regions. In any case, this is not an underworld of departed human souls!

What is really impressive is that, unlike much non-biblical literature of the time, these Scriptures are quite reserved and un-specific on where these “spirits” are. The geography of the spirit world, as such, is of no concern. In any case, surely such concrete and spatial language as “prison” and “eternal (note) chains” is largely figurative when applied to “spirits.”

Finally, what of the proclamation of Christ itself? Many have assumed that Jesus here is evangelizing the dead. Upon this, various doctrines have been built: for example, the doctrine of a “second chance” after death, for those unrepentant in this life. However, we have established that the audience is not departed human souls at all, but rebellious angels. It has been noted already, that the Greek word here for “made a proclamation,” *kerusso*, does not necessarily mean, to evangelize. It can be quite general (e.g. Lk 12:3, Rom. 2:21, Rev. 5:2). Still, in the New Testament it does usually mean, “to preach the gospel.”

It seems reasonable to conclude, that Peter is depicting Christ’s proclaiming the gospel of his triumph over evil and death to these rebellious spirits, not so much in the hope of converting

them, as in order to confirm to them, both their own defeat and the salvation of humanity, through himself.¹⁶ This prepares the way for the emphasis on the subjection of all angelic authority to Jesus in 1 Peter 3:22.

To sum up, 1 Peter 3:18-19 does not speak of Christ in disembodied form preaching to departed human spirits between his death and resurrection. It speaks of the resurrected Christ announcing the salvation he has accomplished for all humanity, and his triumph over Satan, to rebellious angels who are under restraint pending the final judgment.

Christ's triumph is ours also!

Here, Peter is encouraging Christians to be faithful under persecution and temptation. Those who suffer for Christ's sake, he says, are blessed, for he himself, the Righteous One, has suffered for them and through him they belong to God. Around about is the world, indifferent to God, hostile to Christ's followers, licentious (4:3-4), idolatrous, under the sway of satanic evil (5:2). Possibly this tragic state of affairs is traced here, in part, to the influence of the fallen angels of Genesis 6. But through Christ's sacrificial life, death and resurrection, evil's root is cut. Through Him, by faith and baptism (5:19), Christians can and will have total victory over evil and death (also 5:8-11). Christ's own triumph has already been proclaimed to the uttermost bounds of creation. So, let us maintain, fearlessly and humbly, our witness to him (3:14-16). Christ's triumph is ours also!

References

1. E.g. John 5:21; Rom. 4:17, 8:11; I Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:5.
2. J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p.150.
3. J. N. D. Kelly, p.151.
4. J. N. D. Kelly, p.151.
5. Just as, for example, in Isaiah 31:3, the level of the divine is described as "spirit" and the level of the human, or animal, is described as "flesh"

6. See also Rom. 1:4.
7. J. A. Fitzmyer: "The word *sarx* [flesh] here does not mean 'body' (in contrast to his soul), nor even 'humanity' (in contrast to his divine pre-existence), but Christ's earthly human condition (contrasted with his risen state) ... The *pneuma* [spirit] does not mean Christ's 'soul' or his 'divine pre-existence' ... " ("The First Epistle of Peter", in "The Jerome Bible Commentary," p.367). E. Best: "... when spirit is opposed to flesh in the NT the opposition of divine Spirit to human existence is intended ... Christ died in the human sphere but was made alive and continues alive in the sphere of the Spirit" ("First Peter," p.139).
8. C. E. B. Cranfield, "The First Epistle of Peter," London: S.C.M. Press, 1950, p.84.
9. The verb is the same in Greek.
10. E.g. "your spirit" (Phil. 4:23), "the spirits of just men" (Heb. 12:23).
11. In Matt. 14:26, Lk 24:37 and Lk 24:39, it probably means "ghost."
12. E. G. Selwyn, "The First Epistle of St. Peter," London: Macmillan & Co., 1947, p.199. Also J. N. D. Kelly, "A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude," p.154.
13. J. N. D. Kelly, p.105.
14. E. Best (with some hesitation), J. N. D. Kelly, J. A. Fitzmyer (all already cited). Also, e.g., K. S. Wuest, "First Peter in the Greek New Testament," Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1947, p.100; A. M. Stibbs & A. F. Walls, "The First Epistle General of Peter," London: Tyndale, 1959, p.145; W. J. Dalton, "Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits," Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965; D. H. Wheaton, "I Peter", in "The New Bible Commentary," 1977, p.1244; etc.
15. The incident is that originally recounted in Genesis 6:1-4, where the "sons of God" are undoubtedly angels, not humans (compare Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7; commentaries on *Genesis* by D. Kidner [1967], G. von Rad [1972], etc.). The very brief *Genesis* account became the basis for much speculation in

Jewish literature prior to, and contemporary with, the New Testament (e.g. Jubilees 5, 10; Apocalypse of Baruch 61; Testaments of Reuben and Naphtali; 1 and 2 Enoch). Most notably, 1 Enoch elaborates at length on the lust and disobedience of these angels: they “transgressed the Word of the Lord” (1 Enoch 106; compare 1 Pet 3:20). It tells of their imprisonment in fiery darkness and maintains Enoch proclaimed their doom to them (1 En. 12, etc.). Yes, the word “spirits” is used of them (1 En. 12, Jubilees 5). 1 Enoch traces all wickedness in the world to these fallen angels. Of course, Peter and Jude are not necessarily taking all of this on board! The Bible is far more reticent. However, these spirits are clearly regarded as notoriously antagonistic to God, and it was because their story was so well known, that Peter did not need to explain himself more fully.

16. A. M. Stibbs, J. A. Fitzmyer, J. N. D. Kelly.

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Q & A: THE DEVIL HURLED OUT

by Jefferson Vann

Nick is meeting with us at Takanini Community Church in Auckland every week, and together we are watching the “Long Story Short” video series which introduces the story of the Bible.

Last Friday, Nick texted me this question: “*Is there anywhere in the Bible where the devil is hurled out of heaven by God(?)*” Some of the most significant Bible passages that inform readers of Satan and his influence are those where he appears almost by

accident. Jesus rebuked Peter for insisting that he would never go to the cross. He says “Get behind me, Satan.”¹ His rebuke is scathing, and suggests that when we oppose God’s plan, Satan is behind it.

When Satan first appears in the Old Testament narrative, he has possessed the body of a beautiful and wise animal called the serpent. This serpent in Eden is capable of conversing with our ancestors, and leads them to rebel against their maker. The serpent is condemned for his incitement of that rebellion, and God seems to speak through him to Satan himself when he promises that a seed of the woman would do battle with him, be injured in that battle, and finally prevail by crushing the serpent’s head.²

Another passage where we suddenly discover that Satan has slipped into the story is found in Ezekiel 28.

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Because your heart is proud, and you have said, “I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,” yet you are but a man, and no god, though you make your heart like the heart of a god- you are indeed wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you; by your wisdom and your understanding you have made wealth for yourself, and have gathered gold and silver into your treasuries; by your great wisdom in your trade you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth — therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you make your heart like the heart of a god, therefore, behold, I will bring foreigners upon you, the most ruthless of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor. They shall thrust you down into the pit, and you shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas. Will you still say, “I am a god,” in the presence of those who kill you, though you are but a man, and no god, in the hands of those who slay you? You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of foreigners; for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD.’”³

The chapter starts out with an obvious prophecy directed toward the ruler of Tyre. He is called the prince of Tyre, and he is guilty of such pride due to his wealth and accomplishments that he fancies himself a god. Ezekiel predicts that the real God will humble this false god by bringing foreign armies who will “draw their swords against the beauty of [his] wisdom and defile [his] splendor.” As a result, this great prince of Tyre will “die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas.” God asks him, “Will you still say ‘I am a god’ in the presence of those who kill you?” No, this ruler of Tyre is not a god. He will be punished for his arrogance.

In the next section of his prophecy, Ezekiel goes so far to the extreme in both condemning and praising Tyre’s ruler that it appears he is looking beyond the earthly ruler to Satan himself – his spirit-being counterpart.

Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, thus says the Lord GOD: ‘You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you. By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuar-

ies; so I brought fire out from your midst; it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.”⁴

Whoever the referent of this lamentation is, he is called the “king of Tyre” as opposed to the “prince of Tyre” (vs. 1). While other rulers are called kings in Ezekiel,⁵ there must be a reason that a new title is used at this juncture in the prophecy. Since the king of Tyre is called a prince, perhaps Satan is referred to as king in that he is the power behind the power, the pride behind the pride.

Such superlatives are used of the king of Tyre that it seems strange for these words to be referring to a mere man. He was “the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” He was “blameless in [his] ways ‘till unrighteousness was found [in him].” His “heart was proud because of [his] beauty.” He “corrupted [his] wisdom for the sake of [his] splendor.” These descriptions seem to be speaking of — and to — someone greater than a mere human king.

The descriptions of the referent’s past are also problematic if they only refer to a human ruler. Was the king of Tyre “in Eden, the garden of God”? Was he “an anointed guardian cherub” placed “on the holy mountain of God”?

For these reasons, some scholars conclude that the ultimate message of Ezekiel 28:11–19 speaks *through the* human ruler of Tyre and *to the* spirit being that inspired him.⁶

The good news in all this is that if God’s message in Ezekiel 28:12b–16a described the rebellion of Satan, then we would expect 28:16b–19 to describe God’s judgment upon Satan. Notice the specific judgments that are described here:

- He is cast from the mountain on which he had been placed as guardian cherub,⁷
- He is destroyed,
- He is cast to the ground,

- He is exposed before kings,
- He is consumed by fire,
- He is turned to ashes,
- He comes to a dreadful end,
- He shall be no more forever.

Any one of those descriptions of the judgment of Satan might be taken figuratively, were it simply standing alone. But the mass of them seen together seems to prove beyond question that Satan is not an immortal being. God is not going to have to put up with that creature and his prideful rebellion forever. He will come to an end. His future is sealed. Tyre as a nation was destroyed, and its prince with it. Is there any doubt that this king of Tyre will suffer the same fate?

The fact of Satan's eventual complete destruction could be a major means of encouragement to believers, who often (for the time being) suffer at his hands. But this very fact is often ignored completely in Christian theology. Those who are convinced that no beings (either angels or humans) will ever die overlook or redefine the Bible when it speaks about the demise of Satan.

When John saw the vision of everything that is going to make it into the next age, Satan was not there. John said "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth." He saw no lake of fire, no hell, no grave, no Tartarus, no part of the old creation. John said "for the first heaven and the first earth" — i.e. all that was part of the original creation — including Satan — "had passed away." Satan will pass away.⁸

After describing the glories of the holy city, new Jerusalem, John said,

The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars [*all of these terms describe Satan*], their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.⁹

Satan will experience the second death. Satan was said to have been thrown into that lake of fire and tormented day and night for “ages and ages” (the literal rendering of what is usually translated “forever and ever.”¹⁰ No doubt God is going to take a long time to destroy Satan and his evil angels. But to insist that “ages and ages” means eternity makes it impossible for the lake of fire to be what God says it is — the second death.

God created hell for the purpose of destroying his enemies entirely — both soul and body.¹¹ When the demons saw Jesus, they asked him if he had come to destroy them.¹² They knew that their ultimate fate would be destruction at the hands of our savior. The author of Hebrews says that Jesus became a human being so that he could deliver us who fear death — and “destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”¹³ God has prepared a fire for the devil and his angels.¹⁴ Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed in such a fire.¹⁵ Their destruction serves “as an example” of that destruction that awaits Satan and the fallen angels. Those cities are not burning today. They were totally, permanently destroyed.

The adjective *aionios*, usually translated “eternal” described the fire of Sodom and Gomorrah and will describe the fire of hell because it will destroy eternally, that is, permanently. This is the usual meaning of the term *aionios* in the New Testament, as seen in the following examples:

- the permanent sin which can never be forgiven (Mark 3:29).
- the permanent weight of glory compared with our slight momentary affliction (2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 5:10).
- the permanent things that are unseen compared to the transient things that are seen (2 Corinthians 4:18).
- the permanent house (body) in the heavens compared to our temporary tent (body) on earth (2 Corinthians 5:1).
- the permanent destruction the lost will face at Christ’s return (2 Thessalonians 1:9).
- the permanent comfort and good hope we have through

- God's grace (2 Thessalonians 2:16).
- the permanent glory that accompanies salvation in Christ (2 Timothy 2:10).
 - Philemon's permanent return to Colossae, after being parted from them for a while (Philemon 1:15).
 - the permanent salvation made possible by Jesus, our great high priest (Hebrews 5:9).
 - the permanent judgment that will take place after the resurrection of the dead (Hebrews 6:2).
 - the permanent redemption secured by Christ's sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 9:12).
 - the permanent covenant made possible by the shedding of the blood of Christ (Hebrews 13:20).
 - entrance into the permanent kingdom provided for all those who make their calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10–11).

Paul describes Jesus as the ruler who will destroy all of his enemies before delivering the kingdom over to the Father. He will destroy “every rule and every authority and power” — terms that refer to demonic spirits.¹⁶ He must do that or God's plan cannot be accomplished. He must do that *before* he puts an end to death. Before that happens, everyone whose name is not written in the Lamb's book of life will have been thrown into that lake, and will have experienced the second death. Is Satan's name in the Lamb's book of life? No, so his fate is to be destroyed in hell, along with all he has deceived into joining him.

Yes, Nick, Satan has been hurled out of heaven, but that is not the end of his judgment. His first punishment marked the beginning of evil on earth, and he spread that evil and the death it produced. His final punishment will mark the end of evil and death.

References

1. Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33.
2. Genesis 3:15.

3. Ezekiel 28:1–10.
4. Ezekiel 28:11–19.
5. Ezekiel 1:2; 7:27; 17:12, 16; 19:9; 20:33; 21:19, 21; 24:2; 26:7; 29:2f, 18f; 30:10, 21f, 24f; 31:2; 32:2, 11; 37:22, 24.
6. Ron Rhodes, “Commonly Misunderstood Bible Verses” (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2008), 106–107. “... the king is portrayed as having a different nature than man (he is a cherub, considered to be in the inner circle of angels with closest access to God — verse 14). He had a different status than man (he was blameless and sinless — verse 15). He was in a different realm than man (the holy Mount of God — verses 13–14). He received a different judgment than man (verse 16 — he was cast out of the mountain of God and thrown to earth, which seems parallel to description of Satan’s fall in revelation 12).”
7. J. Dwight Pentecost, “Your Adversary the Devil” (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 15. “Now if we were to try to assign positions to the different orders of angels, we would conclude that the cherubim who could stand and look Godward, or minister throneward occupied the highest position of all and had the greatest privilege of any created being. It was over such a privileged class of angels that Lucifer was placed in authority by Divine appointment.”
8. Revelation 21:1.
9. Revelation 21:7–8.
10. Revelation 20:10.
11. Matthew 10:28.
12. Mark 1:24
13. Hebrews 2:14.
14. Matthew 25:41.
15. Jude 7.
16. 1 Corinthians 15:24–26.

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UNITY AND CONFORMITY: AN ADVENT CHRISTIAN ASSESSMENT

by Thomas Loghry

Anyone who is familiar with the Advent Christian denomination knows that much of our history as a denomination has been defined by ardent non-creedalism. This has stemmed from the steadfast conviction that while Scripture is infallible, man is inescapably fallible, and thus whatever interpretation man may render of infallible Scripture, his fallible interpretation cannot be used as a reliable means of determining correct belief. The result then is that what organizationally unites Advent Christians is not any interpretation of Scripture, not even those Advent Christian interpretations laid out in the Declaration of Principles, but the source material of any interpretation which is the Bible. As we technically stand today (functionally this is otherwise), Advent Christian organizational unity is fundamentally Bibliocentric rather than Christocentric. Christocentricity requires an answer to the question, “Who is Christ?” Answering this demands nothing less than “fallible” interpretation.

In light of the upcoming ACGC Triennial convention that promises to consider taking up the NAE statement of faith as our own, it is of utmost importance that we address this philosophy of non-creedalism that will undercut whatever statement of faith we might adopt. To do otherwise will leave us without any real

objective measure of inclusion and exclusion and would subject our conferences to utter parochialism. In the coming months, I intend to address this issue more fully and I would encourage you to do likewise. In any case, I will now do a hop, skip and a jump over this issue of non-creedalism to examine the subsequent reality of our inclusive tradition, its merits and some questions that I believe arise from recent comments by Greg Twitchell and Steve Brown regarding “unity.”

The Theological Misfits

As has already been mentioned, the formation of our denomination has been greatly influenced by its non-creedal tradition. It is the principle that has allowed for diverse opinions to exist in our circles, including undoubtedly heretical opinions regarding the nature of God. While troubling, considered historically it is no wonder such a principle was so readily welcomed. The Millerite/Adventist movement drew persons from all walks of denominational backgrounds. This combined with the fact that many of these persons were not welcome back in their churches of origin made the movement rich for Christian Connexionist picking. While our denomination is now mostly rid of those heretical elements, the heritage of inclusivity has continued. Even in the midst of efforts to refine the Declaration of Principles’ statement on the Bible, efforts that proved divisive, then executive secretary J. Howard Shaw concluded in his observation of the matter, “The ‘Declaration’ has not been a club with which to coerce people into conformity, but rather a unifying instrument of free and joyful witness. Let it so remain.”¹ This principle has effectively remained in place and the present diversity in our denomination is evidence of the continuance of this tradition.

Confronting Reality

Today, we are faced with the tangible reality of this heritage. There continues to be diversity in all sorts of theological and ecclesiological matters among our ranks, even if our cogni-

zance of this has faded with the dissipation of dialogue. Given this reality, we must ask the question: “What does Advent Christian unity look like?” Given the reality of our diversity and our congregationalist practices that privilege the local autonomy of the church, I do not believe it can look like conformity in most cases. At this point, the genie has been let out of the bottle and there is no stuffing him all the way back in without killing him; a demand for comprehensive conformity would likely mean our dissolution. (I do believe there is a need for minimal theological conformity, something like a mere Christianity with wide but firm boundaries that is able to give free range to a variety of viewpoints, but I leave this to be teased out for another time.) Does this then mean that the cause for unity is lost, that unity can only exist where full agreement exists? This admittedly appears to be the case when one looks at the socio-political scene in America, but ought it be the case in the church?

The Basis of Christian Unity

Inasmuch as the church truly needed the Protestant Reformation, it came at the high cost of church unity. True to its name, the Protestant Reformation did not arise from a desire to divide the Church but to reform her. I believe the Adventist movement parallels the Reformation in some significant ways. It was never the intent of Miller and his followers to create new denominations, but rather to restore the hope of Christ’s return to its proper place in the Church. It was only when those who would become Advent Christians were turned away for their conditionalist beliefs that a new denomination was begrudgingly formed. However, unlike the Protestant Reformation, no further division has continued in our midst.

We have already noted some of the troubling rationale behind this and recognized that it has borne some bad theological fruit. However, before utterly condemning our heritage, I think it is important for us consider whether all of the results have been bad. Going back to the Protestant Reformation, I think we

can agree that things could have gone better. The best imaginable result would have been for the Roman Catholic Church to reform and the unity of the church to be maintained. The next best imaginable result would have been for Protestants to remain more greatly united even in the midst of their differences. Obviously negotiating these differences is where the rubber meets the road. Though critical of the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformers were also her children and were somewhat bound to deal with theological differences in a manner similar to which Rome dealt with them. However inevitable division may have been, the result remains dissatisfying.

Why are these divisive results dissatisfying? Fundamentally, I think it is because they defy the words of Christ in John 17. Therein Christ prays,

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me (17:20–23).

The division of the Church is nothing less than the betrayal of our witness of the truth of Christ to world. Excommunication is at times necessary, but this is not the division of the Church but the identification of that which is not the Church. While the various Protestant sects would likely not deny one another's identification as part of the Church, their division tends to speak louder than their words. Can they say amen to Christ's prayer even as they hold each other out at arm's length? Has this not brought shame to the name of Christ?

Returning to our Advent Christian denomination, I believe it is here that we have the opportunity to reclaim the inclusivity of our denomination even as we reject its excesses. In so doing, we

would not be reclaiming inclusivity for the sake of inclusivity, but for the sake of our witness of Christ to the world. Having grown up in this denomination, one of the most beautiful things I have experienced is just how diverse we are. The beauty comes not from the diversity itself but from the reality to which it points; who else could hold together such a motley bunch other than Jesus Christ? This here is the best of Advent Christian humility, in that we submit ourselves to the reality of being joined together in the Jesus Christ despite our differences. This clears the way for the centrality of the gospel mission among Advent Christians, the message of a Risen King who offers resurrection hope.

Unity?

In the March newsletter for the Eastern Regional Association, Eastern Regional Superintendent Greg Twitchell shared a brief word about the church planting conference that would meet from March 21 – 23. Among his comments, he wrote, “As we consider laying the foundation of new churches, I believe that theological unity needs to be part of the discussion.” Subsequently, he encouraged readers to review Steve Brown’s recent article written for this conference entitled, “The Church Planting Paradigm — A Foreword.” In that article, after surveying Advent Christian history and some of the theological difficulties that have occurred throughout the years, Steve takes up the matter of “oneness,” which brings to mind the issue of theological unity that Greg mentioned in the newsletter. I quote Steve Brown here at length regarding this issue for the sake of clarity:

When Greg invited me to write this paper, we discussed the matter of coming to “one mind” on the matter of the apostles’ program for planting and establishing the church. Is this possible? I am reminded of the old canard about the Jews: if three of them have a debate, the outcome is four opinions. Advent Christians show the same tendency.

Yet, Paul exhorted the Philippian church to “complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full

accord and of one mind” (2:2). So, what did he mean? Was his encouragement meant to create absolute binding theological precision on matters of doctrine and practice? Yes and no. The terms he uses, “the same mind” and “one mind” suggest in the first instance that we consciously work toward a common mindset, or way of looking at things, a mutual understanding as a foundation for thinking alike. In the second case, he asks them to think in a similarity of mind and spirit, sort of a blending of soul and sentiment in the truth.

However, Paul is not suggesting that our thinking should be content light, but rather that it unite thought and feeling derived from our common relationship to Jesus in community informed by “the Gospel of Christ” (1:27) “for the sake of Christ” (1:29). This one-mindedness is already ours by virtue of our union with Christ:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus (2:5).

Thus, we do not create one-mindedness as much as we are to embrace it and appropriate it in the humility modeled by the Lord (2:5–11). At once, Jesus is the content and focus of our worldview as well as the source of power to implement all that He teaches us through the Apostles. On this basis we could work toward one-mindedness.²

As you can see, Steve is playing out the tension here in which oneness is ours in Christ even as we work to appropriate that oneness. Of course, to be in Christ requires one to have assumed some minimally necessary theological beliefs, which is why one would not want to deny the need for any “theological precision.” However, the question of “How theologically precise?” seems to haunt his explication of our oneness in Christ.

By the end of the paper, Steve Brown supplies this conclusion:

Is it time for Eastern Region leaders to take a fresh look at the Bible? If so, let it be with the goal of determining the intent

of the original authors, especially in the matters before us. If we focus together on the meaning of the Bible, perhaps Paul's exhortation to "be of the same mind" can be achieved.

Should we take up this challenge, the Region could emerge from the swamps of theological fragmentation to expand our witness with new determination empowered by the Lord Himself.³

Here Steve seems to take us more sharply in a direction that was less distinct earlier on. In his earlier comments, it may have been supposed that the sort of "theological precision" he may have been referencing was broad in scope, perhaps simply excluding non-Trinitarians and the like. But by his conclusion, Steve appears hopeful that there will eventually be no "theological fragmentation" in our denomination. What sorts of consequences might follow from this?

I believe we would all admit that we wish everyone would share the same theological opinions — at least so long as they are the same as our own. That's really the trouble in the whole matter. We understand, without here defining, that there exist minimal beliefs necessary to call oneself a Christian. To that degree, I would hope we would be faithful to be that precise. But what about everything else we believe? Given the reality of our unity in Christ, ought we divide over these other matters? What about our witness and all that was discussed above? Now, it is possible to seek comprehensive theological unity simply through persuasion and dialogue. This is the best meaning of Steve Brown's paper. But what will occur if the day arrives in which there exists a substantial majority opinion? Will the tolerance for theological diversity run dry and will persuasion be replaced by division? If this occurs, what will this say to the world about the reality of our unity in Christ? Will it not appear fabricated, merely the natural assimilation of like-minded people?

We must anticipate these sorts of questions — I believe the answers to them have immense theological and evangelistic consequences. Inasmuch as we work toward the oneness of Christ,

we must not stumble along our way and effectively deny the reality of our unity in Christ by spurning the presence of theological differences in our denomination. We must be faithful to that reality by intentionally committing ourselves to the practices of admonition and persuasion and refusing to employ compulsion and division.

References:

1. J. Howard Shaw. Henceforth VI, no. 1 (Fall 1977).
2. Steve Brown. “The Church Planting Paradigm — A Foreword” pp. 5–6.
3. *ibid.* p. 12.

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THE SPIRIT WORLD

by Rev. Jefferson Vann

The Helpers

God’s love and grace always surpass our expectations. He loves us so much that he gave his Son to be our atoning sacrifice, and our Lord and savior. He gave us his word to guide our walk,

and he gave us his Spirit as our guide and empowerer. But wait ... that is not all. He has also given us an army of spirit beings to assist us as well. These are the angels.

The author of Hebrews sought to prevent readers of that epistle from getting sidetracked from the gospel message. Those first century believers needed to realize that there was nothing more important than Christ. He is supreme — there is no one greater. It is in that context that angels and their ministry are described. They are “ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.”¹ From this brief description, a number of useful starting points for understanding angels can be inferred.

spirit beings

Angels are spirit beings. They can manifest their existence in bodily form, but they do not have to. They are not omnipresent, like God is. Perhaps they have spiritual bodies similar to the kind that believers will have after our resurrection. Much of what is taught about them is speculation. They cannot always be sensed the way humans can. They cannot be everywhere at the same time, but there are angels in heaven,² on earth,³ and in *tartarus*⁴ — wherever that is. The limits to the places they can go (if sent) are not our limits. The conditions in which they can exist are not the same conditions which limit us.

There is a spirit realm. This appears to be what Paul was referring to when he said that “do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the

¹ Hebrews 1:14.

² Gen. 28:12; Matt. 18:10; 22:30; 24:36; Mark 12:25; 13:27, 32; Luke 2:15; John 1:51; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 12:7.

³ Gen. 19:1; 28:12; Rev. 7:1f; 8:13; 12:9; 16:1.

⁴ 2 Peter 2:4. This is the only reference to Tartarus in the New Testament. The Greeks viewed it as a place for the punishment of errant gods. Peter was probably referring to the punishment of some fallen angels by imprisonment as they await judgment.

cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”⁵ They are here, but they are elsewhere too. It seems hard to think about without veering off into science fiction, but it is not fiction. We interact with another world while living on this one.

There are some cultures who have a better grasp of this reality than others. The secular western world has done its best to deny its existence. It seeks to explain every testimony of encounter with the supernatural as coincidence combined with myth, delusion or wishful thinking. Christians from the secular west (or influenced by it) can fall into this trap. If believers exclude the spirit realm from their worldview, they will probably fail to recognize the numerous times in their lives when the two realms collide. That would be a shame.

God’s Spirit understands the things of God. Human spirits understand the things of our world.⁶ It is not preposterous to infer that if there are myriads of spirit beings in a spirit realm somewhere — they can function in that environment. They are adapted to the task of moving throughout the universe to accomplish their mission. They can understand that mission.

sent out to serve

The mission evidently has a great deal to do with humanity. It is not improbable that angels oversee the other creatures in the universe, but the Bible definitely records their interacting with humanity. In the 2011 film “The Adjustment Bureau,” angels are depicted as agents who look after humanity to make sure they do not foul things up by exercising free will. They are pictured as the ones who make all the important decisions behind the scenes. This is not how the Bible describes them. True, angels are powerful, but their power is always harnessed to another’s will. Either

⁵ Ephesians 6:12.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:11.

they serve God, or (in the case of the fallen angels) they have conspired to join Satan in his rebellion against him. The angels are not gods who are running around meddling in the affairs of the universe for their own amusement. They are sent out on a mission.

for the sake of those who are to inherit

The nature of that mission is centered around God's promise for the future of the believer. What they do is not always perceived as good or beneficial because the recipients of their actions often think only of the present. The angels are sent to make sure that God's ultimate will is achieved — to ensure the eternal inheritance of the saints. Even those cultures which have a more developed appreciation for angels tend to see them only as rescue agents, sent to get people out of present danger. They *are* involved in rescue, but not rescue for rescue's sake. They are tasked with preserving the destinies of the sons and daughters of eternity.

watchers

One of the tasks of God's angels is that of observation. They are the watchers who observe all that is happening on the planet.⁷ The primary purpose of their watching is not to pass on information about us. They are not cosmic spies. A watcher in biblical times was someone who kept watch over a city or vineyard or flock or herd to protect it from predators.⁸ When it comes to these spiritual watchmen, the predators may be of the flesh, or they may be other spirit beings. The angels watch to see what

⁷ Daniel 4:7.

⁸ 1 Sam. 14:16; 2 Sam. 18:24ff; 2 Kings 9:17f, 20; 11:18; 2 Chr. 23:18; Job 27:18; Psa. 127:1; 130:6; Song 3:3; 5:7; Isa. 21:6, 11f; 52:8; 56:10; 62:6; Jer. 6:17; 31:6; 51:12; Ezek. 3:17; 33:2, 6f; Hos. 9:8; Mic. 7:4.

Satan is scheming so that they can prevent attacks. They are defending angels, or guardian angels.⁹

The unfortunate thing about good defenses is that when they are working their best — nothing happens. When an enemy realizes that strong forces are guarding the camp, he reconsiders attacking. Most of angelic energy is probably expended preventing open warfare. Believers should be more perceptive of this fact, and more thankful during those times when the worst things do not happen.

messengers

The term is a translation of the normal word for *messenger* in both testaments. In fact, there are several references in the Bible where it is unclear whether spirit beings or human messengers are being referred to. For example, when Rhoda reported that Peter was at the gate, the other disciples there thought that she was mistaken. They said, “It is his angel!”¹⁰ But did they mean his guardian angel, or a messenger he had sent? Likewise, when Jesus sent epistles to each of the seven churches in Asia Minor, he addressed each epistle to the messenger of the respective church.¹¹ Was he writing to spirit beings, or to the people who would be tasked to carry the epistles from Patmos to their respective church?

Regardless what one decides in exegeting any of those passages, most of the references to the term clearly imply actual spirit beings. The use of the term indicates that these spirit beings can communicate God’s will as well as defend his chosen ones. Angelic visitations are prominently recorded in the Bible. It may be that the reason such events figure prominently in the biblical record is that scripture is a means of communication.

⁹ Psalm 91:11; Matt. 1:20, 2:13,19; 18:10; Acts 12:7.

¹⁰ Acts 12:15.

¹¹ Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14.

Angels sometimes communicate face to face,¹² and sometimes through actions,¹³ visions¹⁴ or dreams.¹⁵

armies

In addition to defensive and communicative capabilities, angels can go on the offensive and make war. They are the armies of the God of armies.¹⁶ He sends them out to accomplish his will as well as to ensure it, and to reveal it. At crucial times in history, God has used his angelic hosts to rout human armies. He also has armies of angels in reserve for the day of Christ's return. They will accompany the Lord for two purposes. They will rescue believers — both living and dead — and escort them to the appointment at the marriage supper of the Lamb. They will also attack the fallen angels and defeat them in the battle of Armageddon.

Most human beings — including most believers — have never seen this invading host. Most never will until the day when heaven's king returns to set up his kingdom on earth.

¹² Matthew 28:5.

¹³ Numbers 22:23.

¹⁴ Acts 10:3; 12:9.

¹⁵ Genesis 31:11; Matthew 1:20; 2:13, 19.

¹⁶ 1 Sam. 1:3, 11; 4:4; 15:2; 17:45; 2 Sam. 5:10; 6:2, 18; 7:8, 26f; 1 Kgs 18:15; 19:10, 14; 2 Kgs 3:14; 1 Chr. 11:9; 17:7, 24; Psa. 24:10; 46:7, 11; 48:8; 59:5; 69:6; 80:4, 7, 14, 19; 84:1, 3, 8, 12; 89:8; Isa. 1:9, 24; 2:12; 3:1, 15; 5:7, 9, 16, 24; 6:3, 5; 8:13, 18; 9:7, 13, 19; 10:16, 23f, 26, 33; 13:4, 13; 14:22ff, 27; 17:3; 18:7; 19:4, 12, 16ff, 20, 25; 21:10; 22:5, 12, 14f, 25; 23:9; 24:23; 25:6; 28:5, 22, 29; 29:6; 31:4f; 37:16, 32; 39:5; 44:6; 45:13; 47:4; 48:2; 51:15; 54:5; Jer. 2:19; 5:14; 6:6, 9; 7:3, 21; 8:3; 9:7, 15, 17; 10:16; 11:17, 20, 22; 15:16; 16:9; 19:3, 11, 15; 20:12; 23:15f, 36; 25:8, 27ff, 32; 26:18; 27:4, 18f, 21; 28:2, 14; 29:4, 8, 17, 21, 25; 30:8; 31:23, 35; 32:14f, 18; 33:11f; 35:13, 17ff; 38:17; 39:16; 42:15, 18; 43:10; 44:2, 7, 11, 25; 46:10, 18, 25; 48:1, 15; 49:5, 7, 26, 35; 50:18, 25, 31, 33f; 51:5, 14, 19, 33, 57f; Hos. 12:5; Amos 3:13; 4:13; 5:14ff, 27; 6:8, 14; 9:5; Mic. 4:4; Nah. 2:13; 3:5; Hab. 2:13; Zeph. 2:9f; Hag. 1:2, 5, 7, 9, 14; 2:4, 6ff, 11, 23; Zech. 1:3f, 6, 12, 14, 16f; 2:8f, 11; 3:7, 9f; 4:6, 9; 5:4; 6:12, 15; 7:3f, 9, 12f; 8:1ff, 6f, 9, 11, 14, 18ff; 9:15; 10:3; 12:5; 13:2, 7; 14:16f, 21; Mal. 1:4, 6, 8ff, 13f; 2:2, 4, 7f, 12, 16; 3:1, 5, 7, 10ff, 14, 17; 4:1, 3; Rom. 9:29; Jam. 5:4.

warnings about angels

The Bible warns believers not to get so caught up in fascination about angels that we lose our devotion to Christ. He must remain supreme in our hearts and minds. We should never pray to angels, or worship them.¹⁷ They are subservient to our God, and his servants for *our* sake.

Fallen angels constitute a major problem for believers during this age. The next five chapters (the remainder of the *angelology* section of this book) is dedicated to an awareness of them. The reason is not that they are more important than the good angels who work for our benefit. It is important for believers to understand just exactly how fallen angels can interfere with their lives. The faithful in Christ must do battle in the spirit realm against these spirit beings. Although it is not appropriate to pray to angels, it is most certainly appropriate to pray to God so that he can unleash his army of good angels to combat our enemies as we do spiritual warfare against evil angels.

The Fallen

The Bible says a great deal about Satan, but perhaps a great deal less than one would expect. Satan was the first to rebel against God's sovereignty in heaven, and the leader of humanity's rebellion through deception. One would think that whole books would have been written explaining who this prince of darkness is, and preparing believers to do spiritual warfare against him. But despite his threat to us, God has given us relatively little information about him.

The Bible is written to humans, and reveals only enough about Satan and his kingdom to prepare us for the battles with him we will face. While it is important to know one's enemy, it is even more important for Christians to know themselves, and the

¹⁷ Colossians 2:18.

resources available to them for engaging the enemy. Too much fascination with the enemy can lead to an overemphasis on his power and a fatalistic attitude about the times we face him. For that reason, there is more emphasis in the Bible on Christ than antichrist. There is more said about God's kingdom than Satan's counterfeit.

Some of the most significant passages that inform readers of Satan and his influence are those where he appears almost by accident. Jesus rebuked Peter for insisting that he would never go to the cross. He says, "Get behind me, Satan."¹⁸ His rebuke is scathing, and suggests that when we oppose God's plan, Satan is behind it.

When Satan first appears in the Old Testament narrative, he has possessed the body of a beautiful and wise animal called the serpent. This serpent in Eden is capable of conversing with our ancestors, and leads them to rebel against their maker. The serpent is condemned for his incitement of that rebellion, and God seems to speak through him to Satan himself when he promises that a seed of the woman would do battle with him, be injured in that battle and finally prevail by crushing the serpent's head.¹⁹

Another passage where we suddenly discover that Satan has slipped into the story is found in Ezekiel 28.

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Because your heart is proud, and you have said, "I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas," yet you are but a man, and no god, though you make your heart like the heart of a god — you are indeed wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you; by your wisdom and your understanding you have made wealth for yourself, and have gathered gold and silver into your treasuries; by your great wisdom in your trade you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become

¹⁸ Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33.

¹⁹ Genesis 3:15.

proud in your wealth — therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you make your heart like the heart of a god, therefore, behold, I will bring foreigners upon you, the most ruthless of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor. They shall thrust you down into the pit, and you shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas. Will you still say, “I am a god,” in the presence of those who kill you, though you are but a man, and no god, in the hands of those who slay you? You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of foreigners; for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD.”²⁰

The chapter starts out with an obvious prophecy directed toward the ruler of Tyre. He is called the prince of Tyre, and he is guilty of such pride due to his wealth and accomplishments that he fancies himself a god. Ezekiel predicts that the real God will humble this false god by bringing foreign armies who will “draw their swords against the beauty of [his] wisdom and defile [his] splendor.” As a result, this great prince of Tyre will “die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas.” God asks him, “Will you still say, ‘I am a god’ in the presence of those who kill you?” No, this ruler of Tyre is not a god. He will be punished for his arrogance.

In the next section of his prophecy, Ezekiel goes so far to the extreme in both condemning and praising Tyre’s ruler that it appears he is looking beyond the earthly ruler to Satan himself — his spirit-being counterpart.

Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your set-

²⁰ Ezekiel 28:1–10.

tings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you. By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries; so I brought fire out from your midst; it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.”²¹

Whoever the referent of this lamentation is, he is called the “king of Tyre” as opposed to the “prince of Tyre” (vs. 1). While other rulers are called kings in Ezekiel,²² there must be a reason that a new title is used at this juncture in the prophecy. Since the king of Tyre is called a prince, perhaps Satan is referred to as king in that he is the power behind the power, the pride behind the pride.

Such superlatives are used of the king of Tyre that it seems strange for these words to be referring to a mere man. He was “the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” He was “blameless in [his] ways ‘till unrighteousness was found [in him].” His “heart was proud because of [his] beauty.” He

²¹ Ezekiel 28:11–19.

²² Ezekiel 1:2; 7:27; 17:12, 16; 19:9; 20:33; 21:19, 21; 24:2; 26:7; 29:2f, 18f; 30:10, 21f, 24f; 31:2; 32:2, 11; 37:22, 24.

“corrupted [his] wisdom for the sake of [his] splendor.” These descriptions seem to be speaking of — and to — someone greater than a mere human king.

The descriptions of the referent’s past are also problematic if they only refer to a human ruler. Was the king of Tyre “in Eden, the garden of God”? Was he “an anointed guardian cherub” placed “on the holy mountain of God”?

For these reasons, some scholars conclude that the ultimate message of Ezekiel 28:11–19 speaks *through* the human ruler of Tyre and *to* the spirit being that inspired him.²³

The good news in all this is that if God’s message in Ezekiel 28:12b–16a described the rebellion of Satan, then we would expect 28:16b–19 to describe God’s judgment upon Satan. Notice the specific judgments that are described here:

- He is cast from the mountain on which he had been placed as guardian cherub,²⁴
- He is destroyed,
- He is cast to the ground,
- He is exposed before kings,
- He is consumed by fire,
- He is turned to ashes,

²³ Ron Rhodes, “Commonly Misunderstood Bible Verses” (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2008), 106-107. “... the king is portrayed as having a different nature than man (he is a cherub, considered to be in the inner circle of angels with closest access to God — verse 14). He had a different status than man (he was blameless and sinless — verse 15). He was in a different realm than man (the holy Mount of God — verses 13-14). He received a different judgment than man (verse 16 — he was cast out of the mountain of God and thrown to earth, which seems parallel to description of Satan’s fall in revelation 12).”

²⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, “Your Adversary the Devil” (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 15. “Now if we were to try to assign positions to the different orders of angels, we would conclude that the cherubim who could stand and look Godward, or minister throneward occupied the highest position of all and had the greatest privilege of any created being. It was over such a privileged class of angels that Lucifer was placed in authority by Divine appointment.”

- He comes to a dreadful end,
- He shall be no more forever.

Any one of those descriptions of the judgment of Satan might be taken figuratively, were it simply standing alone. But the mass of them seen together seems to prove beyond question that Satan is not an immortal being. God is not going to have to put up with that creature and his prideful rebellion forever. He will come to an end. His future is sealed. Tyre as a nation was destroyed, and its prince with it. Is there any doubt that this king of Tyre will suffer the same fate?

The fact of Satan's eventual complete destruction could be a major means of encouragement to believers, who often (for the time being) suffer at his hands. But this very fact is often ignored completely in Christian theology. Those who are convinced that no beings (either angels or humans) will ever die overlook or redefine the Bible when it speaks about the demise of Satan.

When John saw the vision of everything that is going to make it into the next age, Satan was not there. John said "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth." He saw no lake of fire, no hell, no grave, no tartarus, no part of the old creation. John said "for the first heaven and the first earth" — i.e. all that was part of the original creation — including Satan — "had passed away." Satan will pass away.²⁵

After describing the glories of the holy city, new Jerusalem, John said "The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars [*all of these terms describe Satan*], their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."²⁶ Satan will experience the second death.

²⁵ Revelation 21:1.

²⁶ Revelation 21:7-8.

Satan was said to have been thrown into that lake of fire and tormented day and night for “ages and ages” (the literal rendering of what is usually translated “forever and ever.”²⁷ No doubt God is going to take a long time to destroy Satan and his evil angels. But to insist that “ages and ages” means eternity makes it impossible for the lake of fire to be what God says it is — the second death.

God created hell for the purpose of destroying his enemies entirely — both soul and body.²⁸ When the demons saw Jesus, they asked him if he had come to destroy them.²⁹ They knew that their ultimate fate would be destruction at the hands of our savior. The author of Hebrews says that Jesus became a human being so that he could deliver us who fear death — and “destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”³⁰ God has prepared a fire for the devil and his angels.³¹ Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed in such a fire.³² Their destruction serves “as an example” of that destruction that awaits Satan and the fallen angels. Those cities are not burning today. They were totally, *permanently* destroyed. The adjective *aionios*, usually translated “eternal” described the fire of Sodom and Gomorrah and will describe the fire of hell because it will destroy eternally, that is, permanently. This is the usual meaning of the term *aionios* in the New Testament, as seen in the following examples:

- the permanent sin which can never be forgiven (Mark 3:29).
- the permanent weight of glory compared with our slight momentary affliction (2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 5:10).
- the permanent things that are unseen compared to the transient things that are seen (2 Corinthians 4:18).

²⁷ Revelation 20:10.

²⁸ Matthew 10:28.

²⁹ Mark 1:24.

³⁰ Hebrews 2:14.

³¹ Matthew 25:41.

³² Jude 7.

- the permanent house (body) in the heavens compared to our temporary tent (body) on earth (2 Corinthians 5:1).
- the permanent destruction the lost will face at Christ's return (2 Thessalonians 1:9).
- the permanent comfort and good hope we have through God's grace (2 Thessalonians 2:16).
- the permanent glory that accompanies salvation in Christ (2 Timothy 2:10).
- Philemon's permanent return to Colossae, after being parted from them for a while (Philemon 1:15).
- the permanent salvation made possible by Jesus, our great high priest (Hebrews 5:9).
- the permanent judgment that will take place after the resurrection of the dead (Hebrews 6:2).
- the permanent redemption secured by Christ's sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 9:12).
- the permanent covenant made possible by the shedding of the blood of Christ (Hebrews 13:20).
- entrance into the permanent kingdom provided for all those who make their calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10–11).

Paul describes Jesus as the ruler who will destroy all of his enemies before delivering the kingdom over to the Father. He will destroy “every rule and every authority and power”— terms that refer to demonic spirits.³³ He must do that or God's plan cannot be accomplished. He must do that before he puts an end to death. Before that happens, everyone whose name is not written in the Lamb's book of life will have been thrown into that lake, and will have experienced the second death. Is Satan's name in the Lamb's book of life? No, so his fate is to be destroyed in hell, along with all he has deceived into joining him.

Satan has rebelled against God, and has convinced an undisclosed number of angels to follow him in that rebellion. They

³³ 1 Corinthians 15:24–26.

have lost their original authority in heaven, and have fallen from their positions of God-ordained rank. They appear to have re-organized into ranks through which they seek to influence humanity by various means. Paul teaches this when he described them as rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil.³⁴ Their goal is to corrupt the earth, and to get as many human beings as possible to share their ultimate fate — complete destruction.

The succeeding chapters will outline the various means that Satan and the demons use to accomplish their purposes. It is best to know what one's enemies are up to. Perhaps this knowledge will assist us in doing battle with them, and resisting their influence until Christ comes and defeats them for good.

The Tempters

In the last chapter, Satan and his loyal demons were described as fallen ones. Their goal is to force as many human beings as possible to join them in their fallen state — and so share their ultimate fate — destruction. This chapter focuses on the primary means that they use to accomplish that purpose.

The four disciples who had been fishermen in Galilee were not the first in the Bible to be fishers of men. Satan and his demons have made it their life's objective to lure as many people as possible into a life apart from God. The bait that they use differs according to the target and the occasion, but the activity is the same. It is temptation.

temptation

The first ever to be tempted to disobey God was Satan himself. He was “blameless in [his] ways from the day [he was] created, till unrighteousness was found in [him].”³⁵ He was tempted,

³⁴ Ephesians 6:12.

³⁵ Ezekiel 28:15.

not by God or some other creature, but by the lure of his own perfection. His heart became proud because of his own beauty, and his obsession with himself corrupted his God-given wisdom.³⁶ His inner being became filled with violence.³⁷ Perhaps in that very moment he plotted the murder of Cain. Maybe at that time he envisioned every murder that will ever happen — including the death of Christ on the cross. His anger over not being able to ascend to deity led him to lash out against humanity — because he knew it would be a man who will sit on the throne of God’s kingdom.

Corrupted by this evil in his heart, Satan was no longer allowed to remain in God’s visible presence. He was cast down from the mountain of God. That very act meant destruction for Satan. He has already been destroyed by divine decree. He just has not experienced the execution of the penalty yet. He died when he left God’s presence in much the same way that humanity died when our ancestors rebelled against God’s commandment. From that time on, Satan has been marked for destruction in the lake of fire.

Since he has made it his goal to take as many with him as possible, he immediately sought out other angels to join him in that rebellion. A significant number did join him, and so were cast out of God’s visible presence along with him. These became the demons. They are missionaries of a sort. They act on behalf of Satan, and seek to enlarge his kingdom by luring people into lives of slavery to their own passions. They did not create the passions: God did. Every craving within us has at its core a legitimate desire that God put within us for his glory and our good.

The *sexual desire* reflects a yearning for intimacy and a desire to express love.

The *desire for food* reflects a yearning to experience the joy of receiving what God has provided for nourishment and enjoyment.

³⁶ Ezekiel 28:17.

³⁷ Ezekiel 28:16.

The desire for power reflects a God-given yearning for significance and to rule over domains that God has given us. God commanded humanity to have dominion over the earth — within the confines of his own authority and power.

The *desire for things* reflects a yearning to possess and enjoy a part of God's creation. God intended humanity to find their joy in experiencing all that he has to offer. That is why he put our ancestors in the garden of Eden. Eden itself became a temptation when Satan took advantage of a prohibition and steered Eve and Adam to steal the prohibited thing, in spite of the overwhelming abundance of non-prohibited things.

The *desire for life* reflects God's original intention that humans live forever in fellowship with him. God placed the tree of life in the midst of Eden to remind Adam and Eve that eternal life was possible for them. Sadly, they were enticed away from this blessing of grace, and lost the opportunity for life apart from Christ. God planned that incident because he purposed that eternal life would be found nowhere else but Christ.

The *desire for friendship* reflects a God-given oneness that all human beings have with each other. We all came from the same ancestor. Even Eve came from Adam through that first surgery performed by God himself in Eden.³⁸ When you and I make friends, it is because we see something of ourselves in our potential friends. Adam's initial reaction to Eve was not a lust for her sexually, but a recognition of this God-given attraction. She was literally "bone of [his] bones, and flesh of [his] flesh." He found an affinity with her that he did not find with any of the other creatures that he observed and named. That affinity is expressed by the nickname Adam chose to call her by. She was to him *Ishah (woman)* because she was taken from *Ish (man)*. That nickname became the generic name of all female humans. This unique friendship between man and woman is the reason for the institution of marriage.³⁹ God has set the monogamous male and

³⁸ Genesis 2:18–23.

³⁹ Genesis 2:24.

female relationship of marriage apart not simply for the purpose of procreation, but so that it would express this unique unity. The fellowship and intimacy of marriage expresses God's intention for friendship at its best. It is the closest we will ever come to the intimacy of the divine Trinity.

There are *many other desires* that are in fact combinations and forms of these desires. For example, the urge that humans have to express themselves in art, music, architecture, etc ... all stream from the yearning for things, and the yearning to continue life. The creator designed us to be creative. He designed beauty in the world, and wants us to reflect that beauty with our minds and hands and voices.

the hook

These legitimate human desires are the bait that the demonic world uses to lure people into lives of sin and slavery. The apostle James said it this way: "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire."⁴⁰ James uses a "fishing metaphor for drawing prey away from shelter in order to trap them with a deadly hook."⁴¹ The bait on the hook is appealing to us because it represents something that is a legitimate desire. It is something that we should have — something that God intends for us. But the bait is not the problem. The hook is the problem. All we see is the bait.

If Adam and Eve had foreseen the pain, misery and death they would cause to untold billions — they would have either run from the serpent, or stomped him to death right then and there. But they didn't see the hook. Like stupid fish, they took in the serpent's lies, and swallowed more than they bargained for.

temptation in the Old Testament

The pages of the Old Testament are filled with examples of people's being tempted — besides the obvious ones in Eden. The

⁴⁰ James 1:14.

⁴¹ "ESV Study Bible" (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008), 2392.

history of God's people is a history of stupid fish, constantly falling for enticing bait. In fact, often someone is found repeatedly falling into the same trap, and his descendants failing in the same manner.

Interestingly, though — the Old Testament does not contain the word *temptation*, or *tempt* or *tempter*, or any other derivatives of the word. That does not mean that no temptation is recorded. Notice these examples of temptation:

“Beware lest wrath entice you into scoffing, and let not the greatness of the ransom turn you aside.”⁴²

If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which neither you nor your fathers have known, some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near you or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other, you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people.⁴³

These are examples of the Hebrew word *sut*, which conveys the idea of tempting someone to do something wrong. In the first example, Elihu has been preaching to Job, and thinks he has convinced Job that God has brought all his problems on him as a ransom — that is — to gain his devotion back. Elihu warns Job not to let the severity of (he thinks) God's judgment turn him aside. He is afraid that Job is going to be tempted to scoff at God — to do what Job's wife suggests — curse God and die.⁴⁴ Elihu was wrong about Job's troubles being caused by God, but he was

⁴² Job 36:18.

⁴³ Deuteronomy 13:6–9.

⁴⁴ Job 2:9.

right in his assessment of what hard times can do to a person. Troubles don't always make us stronger, and they don't necessarily drive us closer to God. For every person who is purified by trials, there are dozens who just go deeper and deeper into sin. Suffering can lure the unsuspecting fish into biting the hook, rebelling against God and all that is holy.

Hard times can lead a loving couple to turn against each other and divorce. Hard times can turn family members against each other. Unexpected difficulties can drive a wedge between friends. Unplanned obstacles can discourage and destroy congregations. A bait does not have to look good. It merely has to entice the fish to bite. Satan sometimes uses hard times to get people to turn away from God. Ironically, God is the only one who has power to take us through the hard times so that we experience his intended victory.

The other use of *sut* is the Deuteronomy passage where Moses warns the Israelites that they will be tempted to rebel against God once they have taken over the promised land. Moses predicts that God is going to cut off the nations before them, so the Israelites will be able to dispossess them and dwell in their land.⁴⁵ But he warns that the land is going to contain more than just milk and honey. There will be traps set throughout the land. He tells the Israelites not to be curious about the gods of these nations that God has allowed them to destroy. He particularly warns them not to inquire *how* those nations served their gods.⁴⁶ We humans are insatiably curious about one another. We are always borrowing from other people and societies things that appeal to us. Perhaps this trend may be called the *lure of conformity*. But Moses warns the Israelites not to borrow the religious practices of the nations they dispossess.

The temptation is not — per se — the worship of other gods. It is — at least at first — the temptation to worship the LORD in the same way as those other gods are worshipped. Moses says,

⁴⁵ Deuteronomy 12:29.

⁴⁶ Deuteronomy 12:30.

“You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.”⁴⁷ This is why Moses had prescribed the complete obliteration of all the places of worship as soon as the Israelites took over the land.⁴⁸ God is not to be worshipped in the same manner — as if he is the same as — any other god.

But the temptation described in Deuteronomy 13:6–9a is even more disturbing than that described in Deuteronomy 12. It speaks of Israelites themselves enticing friends or relatives to abandon the Lord altogether and go and serve those pagan gods. Moses, once again, prescribes destruction, but this time he steps up the penalty. He labels this kind of temptation as deserving the death penalty. If anyone dared to lure you away from God, you should not listen to him, pity him, or conceal him. Your hands should cast the first stone, to be followed by the hands of all the people.

This seems a harsh rule to our modern senses. Those of us Christians who have had the privilege of living in pluralistic societies where freedom of religion is protected might have problems with these Scriptures. We must understand that God knew that his people would self-destruct in the promised land. He also knew that the very key element that would cause their self-destruction is giving in to this very temptation. This command was given out of love. If it had only been followed, it would have kept the nation of Israel from experiencing centuries of heartache and death.

Here again, the Hebrew word *sut* is used for enticement to do something wrong. The bait on the hook was the lure of the strange, the different. Perhaps the tempter would suggest that if the Israelites just do the things that the Canaanites did, then they would have the abundant crops, herds and flocks that the Canaanites enjoyed.

⁴⁷ Deuteronomy 12:31.

⁴⁸ Deuteronomy 12:2–3.

Satan had used the lure of conformity in Eden as well. He had suggested that if Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, they need merely to snack on this food-of-the-gods. Sometimes keeping up with the Jones' can be a deadly trap.

Another Hebrew word used in the Old Testament to describe temptation is found in these texts:

If my heart has been enticed toward a woman, and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door, then let my wife grind for another, and let others bow down on her. For that would be a heinous crime; that would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges; for that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon, and it would burn to the root all my increase.⁴⁹

If I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor, and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand, this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I would have been false to God above.⁵⁰

My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse.'⁵¹

The Hebrew word that is translated "entice/d" in these passages is *patah*, and it suggests that the one being tempted is open to being deceived into accepting wrong as if it is right. The bait in each of these instances is different, but each involves something that is morally repugnant, but is being presented in the best of lights. In Job 31, Job is defending himself against charges that he has

⁴⁹ Job 31:9–12.

⁵⁰ Job 31:26–28.

⁵¹ Proverbs 1:10–14.

brought on the troubles and grief he has faced by committing some secret sin. In verses 9–12, Job tells his accusers that if he had been tempted to seek sexual favors from his neighbor’s wife, and given in to that temptation, then he would admit it, and accept whatever penalty the judges might mete out for the offense. If he had done such a thing he would deserve to lose all his possessions. But — Job’s point is — he hadn’t given in to that temptation. He hadn’t committed adultery, so he does not deserve what happened to him.

In verses 26–28, Job tells his accusers that if he had secretly committed idolatry by worshipping the sun or the moon (a religious affection very common in his day) he would equally deserve punishment. But, again, Job denies any spiritual impurity or false devotion. He knows wrong from right, and has not allowed any graying of the lines between black and white.

In Proverbs 1:10–14, the sin is gang membership (or its 1000 BC equivalent). A father warns his son that some of his contemporaries will try to get him to throw in his lot with them — and they will murder, rape and pillage until they fill their houses with all kinds of glorious stuff. The tempters will seek to deceive the son into believing that the end justifies the means. If all one wants out of life is a house full of stuff — and if right and wrong are merely subjective ways of looking at the world — it makes sense. But if right and wrong are objective facts — governed by a God who judges rightly and defends the victims of violence — the son had better not listen to his friends.

In only one of these texts is there a group of human tempters doing the deceiving (or attempting it). But in each text, there is clearly an implication that someone is trying to tempt by means of deception. The “mark” is being acted on by a tempter. The question is — who is the tempter?

the tempter

In the New Testament, the answer is clear. The person behind all temptation is Satan. Immediately after Jesus’ baptism, the Gospels say that he “was led up by the Spirit into the wilder-

ness to be tempted by the devil.”⁵² Matthew calls the devil “the tempter.”⁵³ Although he does not personally tempt every human being on the face of the planet, he is the force behind every temptation. His army of fallen angels are doing his bidding. They are the tempters because they are serving the tempter.

Satan’s primary and most often means of affecting change in this world is through temptation. He and the demons bombard the minds of human beings with thoughts that appeal to our desires, but which are really designed to enslave us.

using desires to tempt us to cheat

Jesus’ ordeal in the wilderness gives insight into what the tempters seek to do:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”⁵⁴

Hunger is not a temptation. It is a natural response to being deprived of food for an inordinate period of time. Hunger drives us to procure or prepare meals. It adds to the enjoyment of what is eaten. In this case, the tempter saw Jesus’ hunger as an opportunity to get him to overturn the consequence of Adam’s fall. God had told Adam that one consequence of his rebellion in Eden will be that he will have to work the ground to produce food for himself and his family to eat. All those in Adam (including Jesus) must abide by these rules. No matter what food anyone eats, someone has to work for it.

⁵² Matthew 4:1, cf. Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2.

⁵³ Matthew 4:3.

⁵⁴ Matthew 4:1–3.

Jesus is entirely capable of creating food out of the rocks. That is not the issue. Satan is trying to get Jesus to see the food from rocks as something that he deserves because he is the Son of God. The tempter is seeking to get Jesus to the point where he feels the rules do not apply to him. But Jesus is purposely starving himself in the Judean desert precisely because he is a human being submitting to God's will. The whole purpose of testing in the wilderness is to demonstrate to the spirit world that the rules do apply to Jesus. If he is going to be humanity's Savior, he must abide by humanity's lot. That is why Jesus' response to the devil had nothing to do with Jesus' special rank as the Son of God:

“But he answered, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”⁵⁵

Jesus had sensed the Holy Spirit lead him into the desert just as he led the people of Israel into the desert. He intended to be there 40 days — one day for each year that the Israelites wandered. His purpose was not to get really hungry. His purpose was to obey God. He knew that God would take care of him — just as God took care of the Israelites. He saw beyond those wilderness days and anticipated his provision — his own promised land.

His quotation falls within a passage where Moses reminds Israel that trusting God during the time of discipline is the way into blessing:

The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land ... he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna ... that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ... For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land ... in which you will eat bread without scarcity, ... And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Matthew 4:4.

⁵⁶ Deuteronomy 8:1–10 (excerpts).

The tempter comes along and suggests to Jesus that the rules need not apply to him. He has a special position, and that allows him to skip the times of fasting and go directly to the times of feasting. It all seemed very logical, especially to someone who hadn't eaten in over a month. Temptation takes advantage of present weakness, and seeks to get the victim to cut corners in the race and proceed directly to the finish line. In God's eternal kingdom, no one is ever going to go hungry, or suffer the lack of fulfillment of any desire. But until that kingdom comes in time, all of those natural desires will serve as bait for the tempters to get us to rebel against our creator.

using the word to tempt us to test God

The second temptation (in Matthew's order) has the devil quoting from Psalm 91 to get Jesus to test God's love and protection.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"⁵⁷

The tempters know Scripture, and will use it if they need to – if they feel it will convince anyone reluctant to rebel against God's will. Usually, it is not necessary for the demons to resort to this tactic. Usually desires alone are sufficient bait to catch humans and get them to sin. But, deception about God's will expressed in Scripture is a helpful second method.

Here is a bit more of the context of the words Satan quoted.

Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place — the Most High, who is my refuge — no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. For he will com-

⁵⁷ Matthew 4:5–6.

mand his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.” Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.”⁵⁸

Some suggest that what Satan has done is take a promise from God’s word out of its intended context here. That is not what is happening. Jesus meets all the requirements as a recipient of God’s promise: he knows the Lord’s name (14), holds fast to the Lord in love (14), and has made the Lord his dwelling place (9). A person who so trusts the Lord has every right to expect the Lord to protect her as she faces the challenges and pitfalls of life.

The devil has done good exegesis. His failing is in the area of application. He suggests that Jesus test to see if God will hold up his end of the bargain. The psalmist did not encourage his readers to so test the Lord. The psalmist was simply expressing his confidence that if anything bad did happen in his life, the Lord would be there to rescue him. He was not suggesting that his readers go jump off a 300 foot pinnacle, any more than they go lion hunting, or snake handling.

The tempter is misusing a text by trying to get Jesus to test and see *if* God can be trusted. Temptation often distorts God’s word into a kind of game, where we stretch the limits of its meaning. Tempters can take good theology about God’s sovereign election and turn it into permission to sin, since one is already a believer, so it is “safe.” Temptation can take a correct theological position and use it as an excuse to put down and isolate oneself from other believers — who don’t have a good grasp on that doctrinal position. The tempters are adept at using the word of God to entice us to test the Lord, and so express lack of confidence in him.

⁵⁸ Psalm 91:9–15.

Also, that testing is wrong because it takes back the reins of one's life and dishonors God. Believers who have committed themselves to the Lord have given over their freedom to make things happen. They have declared loyalty to God, and have given over control of their lives to him. If, in the course of their lives they happen to fall off a cliff, or encounter a lion or adder, they have no reason to fear. God is their refuge and he will rescue them. But they will not test him. That would be taking the reins back from the one to whom they have given it.

So, "Jesus said to (the tempter), 'Again it is written, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."'"⁵⁹ Jesus was once again quoting from Moses, who told the Israelites "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah."⁶⁰ He was referring to an incident that had happened when the Israelites were in the desert (like Jesus was) after leaving Egypt.

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of

⁵⁹ Matthew 4:7.

⁶⁰ Deuteronomy 6:16.

the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”⁶¹

They had followed Moses and the Lord into the desert, then looked around and noticed that there was no more Nile river to get their fresh water from. So they turned against Moses and started quarrelling with him. For generations, that place would be called Meribah (quarrelling) in remembrance of the time when the Israelites gave in to the temptation to complain.

It would also be called Massah (testing) in remembrance of the time when the Israelites tested God. They had done their part (the walking out of Egypt). They expected God to respond to their faith with the appropriate provisions. If Psalm 91 had been written, they probably would have quoted it to Moses, too. Their whole complaint was that provision was part of the covenant, and that God had better keep his side of the agreement — or else.

Whole sections of Christendom continue to make similar mistakes. Some assume that they have access to a treasury of merit that will protect them due to the excess faith and works of others. Some assume that their faith alone is an appropriate bargaining chip that will force God’s hand. But God is free, and he has decided that his love and grace will be freely given. He will not be manipulated.

using shortcuts to tempt us to idolatry

The final temptation that Matthew records has the devil giving Jesus an opportunity to get all that he is destined for — without going to the cross.

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a

⁶¹ Exodus 17:1–7.

very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”⁶²

The ESV Study Bible comments on this text: “The devil offers a shortcut to Jesus’ future reign in God’s kingdom — a shortcut that side-steps Jesus’ redemptive work on the cross.”⁶³

The tempters really have no problem with humanity’s thirst for holiness and wisdom and service to each other, and all our other noble desires. They simply want us to gain our glory by submitting to the devil. Satan delights when people think they are following God by trusting in a religious image. His demons possess those images. When the False Prophet convinces a person that God is blessing her through — or by means of an image, he has gained another religious devotee to Satan’s kingdom.

There are no short cuts. Satan is a liar,⁶⁴ and he was lying to Jesus when he promised him the world — literally. Jesus caught him in the act.

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”’”⁶⁵

This final quote is also from Moses, who warns the Israelites not to forget God when he blesses them:

And when the LORD your God brings you into the land ... take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you, for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God, lest the anger of the LORD your

⁶² Matthew 4:7-9.

⁶³ “ESV Study Bible,” 1825.

⁶⁴ John 8:44.

⁶⁵ Matthew 4:10.

God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.⁶⁶

God is a jealous God. We are his possession. He will not share his possession with any substitutes. In the same chapter where Moses tells Israel to love the LORD their God with all their heart and soul and might,⁶⁷ he tells them not to love anyone else. The greatest of all commandments is not that we love our creator, but that we love him exclusively.

Our love for God should be such that all other loves should be hate compared with this exclusive love. So, Jesus says “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”⁶⁸ He illustrates this by talking about people who plan to build something or go to war, but are not able to finish what the planned because they did not count the cost.

It is all or nothing. If you plan on being a Christian and a good child to your parents, a good spouse, or parent or sibling, or even to preserve your own life — the tower will never be built. There are only enough resources for one project, not two. If your project is to love God with *all* of who you are, you can make it. But if you plan on dividing the resources so that your devotion is split between God and anyone else (even yourself) both projects will fail.

The tempters are all about trying to convince people that they can have it both ways. Remember that the serpent did not just tell Eve that she should rebel against God. All he wanted her to do was put her desires and needs on the same level as her devotion to God. He convinced her that the forbidden fruit “was to be desired to make one wise.”⁶⁹ She reasoned that God wanted her to enjoy the food he created, and he also wanted her to have fel-

⁶⁶ Deuteronomy 6:10–15 (excerpts).

⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 6:4.

⁶⁸ Luke 14:26.

⁶⁹ Genesis 3:6.

lowship with him — and to do so she needed to be wise, like him. She was right in her conclusions, but wrong on the means to get there. The tempter had kept reminding her of the *self*-project that she lost track of the original *God* project.

This — by the way — explains why there had to be at least one forbidden thing in Eden. Eden was a test to see if humanity would let *anything* come between themselves and God. It was a test to see if Adam and Eve would love God with *all* their heart and soul and might. They failed the test, and plunged the human race into the depths of mortality and depravity.

Along came Jesus, and the serpent tries the same trick. He offers Jesus a substitute to the cross — a way to rule all the kingdoms of the world without suffering as the world's ransom. Fortunately for us, Jesus was aware of the temptation, and would not give in. He not only accepted God's call on his life, he was also willing to take God's way to accomplish it. If he had chosen any other way, it would have been idolatry.

The tempters are proficient at giving people alternate choices so that they accomplish legitimate objectives through illegitimate means. It is very easy to criticize the pagan in the two-thirds world who places a duded-up doll in his store window for good luck. We Westerners laugh at such blatant idolatry, and consider it foolishness. But we are often just as guilty of idolatry when we place *self* on the throne of our lives and tell God he will have to wait for an appointment because we don't have time for religion — we have a life to live. The same tempters are telling the same lie, and both sinners are believing it.

bondage

The result of giving in to temptation is not usually immediate death. Were that the case, humanity would not be around by now. Instead, yielding to temptation results in bondage — or slavery. Every time one yields to temptation and sins, it makes it that much harder to get free of the bondage. All it takes is one sinful act to earn the penalty of destruction in the lake of fire on judg-

ment day. That one sin results in bondage, and makes the sinner more and more liable to sin, which leads to further bondage.

resources to overcome temptation

Jesus waited until after he had been baptized by John the Baptist before he went on his 40 day spiritual journey in the Judean desert. He did this as a visual aid for us — to show us what resource God has provided to help us resist the tempters' traps. At his baptism, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and rested on Jesus.⁷⁰ When Jesus went into the desert, it was the Spirit that led him there.⁷¹ God had provided the “way of escape” already for Jesus, so that he would be “able to endure” it.⁷² That way was the indwelling Holy Spirit. The fortunate thing for Christians who face temptation is that we, too, have the same resource available to us.

Another resource that we have is the intercessory prayers of Jesus himself as the high priest of the new covenant. He knows what temptation is — since he faced every conceivable kind of temptation. Because “he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”⁷³ One of the most powerful mental images one can keep in her mind while being tempted is that of the Lord Jesus in prayer for her at the very moment temptation is taking place. It takes a very hardened soul to ignore a praying Jesus.

It can also be helpful to imagine a tombstone with your name on it when you are being tempted. James said that “desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”⁷⁴ The newborn baby of sin looks very appealing, but it will grow up into death. Imagining a tombstone with your name on it helps you to see that. Paul said something similar: “the wages of sin is death.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Matthew 3:16.

⁷¹ Matthew 4:1.

⁷² 1 Corinthians 10:13.

⁷³ Hebrews 2:18.

⁷⁴ James 1:15.

⁷⁵ Romans 6:23.

Husbands and wives can help each other resist temptation by keeping their physical relationship strong and consistent. Paul recommends this as a means of avoiding temptation because of lack of self-control.⁷⁶ The same principle can also apply to believers helping other believers to avoid temptation by making sure that there are legitimate means of meeting their God-given desires. Part of loving one another is providing for one another's needs. When the occasion presents itself for us to help others, we should do so. Like the early church in Acts, we should see to it that there is not a needy person among us.⁷⁷ It is not as easy to fall for some temptations when you have all you need.

spiritual warfare

Given all these resources that believers have for resisting the devil and overcoming temptation, one would think that living in victory would be commonplace. Yet, the Christian life is one of constant battle with these (usually) unseen tempters. Also, losing to temptation is only one of the ways a person can fail at spiritual warfare. When this typical strategy fails to work, the fallen angels have other ways of putting humanity in bondage. In the next chapters, some of those other strategies will be examined.

The Deceivers

Eden

Another look at the story of the fall in Genesis 3 shows that there was more to Eve's temptation than luring her with thoughts of a delicious apple (or whatever it was). The serpent entered the picture, and we are told that he is craftier than any other beast of the field. His capacity for speech seemed a good clue for that observation.

⁷⁶ 1 Corinthians 7:5.

⁷⁷ Acts 4:34.

He uses his craftiness to introduce himself with a curious question.” He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”⁷⁸ This is what the rhetoricians call a loaded question. It ranks right up there with “have you stopped beating your wife?” There is no good answer to the question because any attempt at answering it could have sprung back in Eve’s face.

For example, what if Eve had pointed out that she had never actually heard God give the prohibition? She, after all, was still part of the body of Adam when God told him “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”⁷⁹ So, she could have said “no,” but that would not have been exactly honest. No doubt Adam had briefed his wife on the importance of avoiding the tree. This is clear from the answer she did give.

But she could not precisely answer “yes” either. God had not prohibited any of the trees of the garden, as the serpent’s question suggested. In fact, of the multitude of beautiful and delicious fruits available, it was only one that was taboo. So, answering the serpent’s question with a “yes” would be uncalled-for.

Eve tried to respond to the serpent as best as she knew how. Her answers seem to have added a bit more to the prohibition than what was originally there: “And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.”’”⁸⁰

Scripture does not record God saying that the humans could not touch the tree or its fruit. His prohibitions appear to have been strictly against eating it. Either Eve is stretching the command here, or she may be reflecting the command as she heard it from Adam. Either way, the serpent senses that this half-truth can be very useful to him.

⁷⁸ Genesis 3:1.

⁷⁹ Genesis 2:17.

⁸⁰ Genesis 3:2–3.

Notice the bait that the serpent presents to Eve to get her to simply take the fruit into her hand: “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁸¹ The serpent suggests not that the prohibition is untrue, but that there is another reason why God would not want humans eating of this special fruit.

Look at what Eve sees in the forbidden fruit now:

It is “good for food.” Perhaps Eve was hungry. It makes sense that the serpent would look for an opportune time to tempt Eve. Hunger is not a temptation, but it is an incubator in which temptation can grow and become strong. Undoubtedly, she had not been fasting for over a month as Jesus had been when the tempter came to him, but she was probably just hungry enough for her stomach to allow deception to overrule her mind.

There was nothing wrong with Eve’s desire for food, or with her awareness that this fruit could appease that hunger. Her problem was that she had taken her eyes off all the rest of the garden, and focused her hunger on the one fruit that was forbidden. Her hunger alone would never have driven her to take of that tree. She was being deceived.

It is “a delight to the eyes.” Eve, like most women, appreciates beautiful things. She has an appreciation for the glory of God reflected in the things he has created. She sees that glory there in that fruit. She sees it because it is really there. The Bible does not say that the forbidden fruit was a hideous warped thing. It was really beautiful, and Eve enjoyed staring at it.

Again, God had apparently not prohibited looking at the fruit. But Eve’s problem was that as she looked, the appeal of this fruit became an obsession. The beauty of this one thing seems to have clouded her mind to all the beautiful things in all of Eden that the Lord had not forbidden.

⁸¹ Genesis 3:4–5.

The sons of Eve follow in her footsteps. God grants most of us the joy of beautiful possessions, and the thrill of a beautiful partner to share life with. How do we respond to these acts of grace? We covet other people's stuff, and desire other people's wives. We are deceived by the same deception that our mother faced in Eden. But, unlike her, we cannot claim ignorance of the outcome. We know that coveting what does not belong to us will lead to loss of what does — but we do it anyway. Stupid.

Back to Eve — the desire to see something beautiful and to eat something scrumptious was apparently not enough to convince her. But she kept looking, and kept listening to the serpent's words. Those words rolled around in her head. Suddenly, this fruit is something more:

It is “to be desired to make one wise.” She and Adam had an entire garden filled with discoveries. God had designed them to rule over all his domains. He had given Adam the work of cultivating the garden and keeping it. Adam had also enjoyed learning about all the different kinds of animals, and perhaps the plants as well. But this particular plant offered a short-cut to the possession of immediate wisdom. The serpent had said “that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁸²

What a tremendous temptation that was! To go from creature status to like-the-creator status in just one bite — now that is discovery. Eve knew that God's goal was for the two of them to rule over God's creation. She reasoned “Who is better able to rule God's creation than someone like him?”

She had convinced herself to take the fruit in her hands. Now what? Well — first of all, she did not turn into a pillar of salt. She did not die right there on the spot. So, it must not have been true that God had prohibited merely touching the tree. If he had, Eve would have gone “poof” and God would have had to go back and do more surgery to give Adam wife number two.

⁸² Genesis 3:5.

Well, Eve lets this roll around in her brain also. She has not been struck dead, so she figures she might as well go ahead and take a nibble. “In for a penny, in for a pound.” Well, she ate it, and she did not immediately die. Didn’t God say that she would?

Not exactly. What God had said to Adam was that “in the day that you (as humanity’s representative) eat of it you shall surely die.” Those words ‘shall surely die’ in Hebrew are a combination of two words from the same root. The words literally are “dying, you shall die.” What God had warned Adam of is that from the very moment that he ate of the tree, he, and all of those in him (including Eve) would become dying — mortal. That mortality would mean that each person in Adam would eventually die. That was the “you shall die” part.

I am sure that Eve did not understand the subtleties of Proto-Semitic grammar, and did not think much about what might happen later. All she knew was that she had eaten of the forbidden fruit and had lived to tell about it. That was enough for her to believe what the serpent had told her.

From that moment, she became in league with the devil. The very next thing she did was grab her husband and tell him “eat this” and he did. Before either of them had finished digesting their snack, they both knew what it meant to be on the wrong side of God. The wisdom that they had sought — knowing good and evil — did not turn out to be such a good thing after all.

They looked at each other and both realized that they were naked. They had been naked before, and were not ashamed.⁸³ Now they were naked and felt shame. Why? They had lost the glory of innocence.

This story from ancient history reminds us that when temptation is not enough, the tempters will use deception to enslave us. They organize humans with political and religious systems that perpetuate shared deceptions. They cleverly mix lies with truth. Just a few lies are enough to do damage to a society, and with it.

⁸³ Genesis 2:25.

the father of lies

Jesus called Satan “the father of lies.” He said that the devil “has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”⁸⁴ It should be no surprise, then, that deception is one of the major means that Satan uses to manipulate the nations. The kinds of lies that he uses are like the proverbial “bad apple.” They are mixed with entire barrels of truth, and turn the entire societies that fall for them into rottenness. Unlike God, who never lies,⁸⁵ the devil only tells the truth when doing so helps to prop up one of his lies.

Early in Acts, Luke records that Satan had “filled the heart” of Ananias to lie about some money that he gave.⁸⁶ Satan did not object to Ananias’ giving to the ministry, because he could gain supremacy in the lives of Ananias and his wife Sapphira by deceiving them into thinking that Jesus would not mind their holding back some of the money. The Holy Spirit (who does not like to be lied to) made this deception backfire by exposing it, and killing the two who had been partners with the devil in the conspiracy.

Paul

The devil has deceived a great multitude of people into worshipping and serving “the creature rather than the Creator.”⁸⁷ In some cultures. This involves the veneration or manipulation of carved, printed or fashioned images. In other cultures, people worship themselves and pretend that the creature has the same status as the creator. Either way, deception has occurred, and it has caused the deceived to exchange “the truth about God for a lie.”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ John 8:44.

⁸⁵ Titus 1:2.

⁸⁶ Acts 5:3.

⁸⁷ Romans 1:25

⁸⁸ Romans 1:25.

The apostle Paul had warned the Corinthians of this tendency by saying that he was “afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”⁸⁹ He wrote to his partner, Timothy that “evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”⁹⁰

Another significant text is where Paul warns the Colossians against the heresy that seeks to turn them away from the true faith. He tells them “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”⁹¹ It is these deceiving elemental spirits (demons) who are the author of human tradition, particularly when it conflicts with the gospel of Christ.

Only a small percentage of humanity would knowingly follow the teachings and ways of Satan and the demons. For that reason, they must deceive in the darkness of anonymity. They must influence people to do their will, while at the same time convincing them that they are doing their own will.

John

The apostle John speaks of “many deceivers” who “have gone into the world.”⁹² He is speaking of false prophets, but perhaps also referring to the spirit beings who influence them. He goes on to say that “Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.”⁹³ He warns against those who go ahead and do not “abide in the teaching of Christ.”⁹⁴

⁸⁹ 2 Corinthians 11:3.

⁹⁰ 2 Timothy 3:13.

⁹¹ Colossians 2:8

⁹² 2 John 1:7.

⁹³ 2 John 1:7.

⁹⁴ 2 John 1:9.

Doctrine mattered to John. He ministered during a time when pagan doctrine was seeping into the church — doctrine that would eventually turn the church into a formal, ritualistic shell of its former self. It would take centuries of reform and revival for the church to thrive again. Satan and the demons did this, not by turning people from Christ, but by deceiving them into believing wrong things about him.

When John wrote Revelation, he recorded the fate of Satan. The deceiver will be thrown into the bottomless pit, or abyss. The purpose of this punishment is so that he is out of the way while you and I have the chance to reign with Christ. John saw a mighty angel throw “him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer.”⁹⁵ This incarceration will take place after Christ returns, and before judgment day. It will last for 1,000 years. After that period of time, Satan will be released “and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle.”⁹⁶ He will be utterly defeated at that battle, but he will have managed to deceive many again — even after a 1,000 year reign of righteousness on earth without his influence.

deliverance

To be “taken captive” is to be in bondage, and need deliverance. There is just as much potential for a person to be taken captive by a false teaching as there is for her to be in bondage due to giving in to temptation. The bondage will progress naturally if it is never challenged by someone ministering deliverance by God’s grace.

Some can be in a slight state of bondage for years — as long as there is no effort from an intercessor to set her free. The longer a person is in bondage, the harder it will be to set her free. Usual-

⁹⁵ Revelation 20:3.

⁹⁶ Revelation 20:8.

ly arguments — even biblical arguments — have little effect. The reason is that deception permeates the heart as well as the head.

If you seek to minister deliverance to someone who has been deceived by demons, it is probably best not to try to reason with her — at least not in the sense of a debate on the issues. Proclaim the gospel of salvation by grace bought by the blood of Christ. Use this teaching as an anchor, and you will find that the demonically deceived will be less liable to drift away into the depths of her own deception. Patience is also called for, because those who are enslaved through deception cannot be set free easily.

resistance

The apostles James⁹⁷ and Peter⁹⁸ both encourage believers to resist the devil. Resistance — when having to do with deception — means having a firm grasp on the truth. This suggests that the best way to fight bondage in this area on a personal level is to get a good, strong and comprehensive understanding of what God says in his word.

Paul mentioned to the Colossians that he rejoiced to see the “the firmness of (their) faith in Christ.”⁹⁹ That firm faith can only come with time spent learning and applying God’s word.

Learning to resist in the particular areas where demons seek to deceive you will require specific attention to your own personal history. You must remember the specific areas in your life where you have allowed yourself to be deceived. You must spend time building up your faith and making it more firm in those specific areas. The battlefield of your mind requires shoring up in the places where the defenses have proven weak in the past. Otherwise, the Adversary will simply keep attacking where he knows the resistance is low.

⁹⁷ James 4:7.

⁹⁸ 1 Peter 5:9.

⁹⁹ Colossians 2:5.

darkness

Remember that the easiest way for demons to continue winning the battles they fight with you is for you to ignore their existence. As long as you are convinced that every challenge you face in your spiritual life is due to your own desires or sinful nature, you are in danger of falling for deceptions that keep you sinning. The demons are creatures of darkness. They will not expose themselves to the light unless they feel doing so will give them an advantage. Their usual modus operandi is to remain in the background — the darkness.

A particularly effective way of deceiving that the demons often utilize is accusation. Dealing with this demonic strategy will require a separate chapter.

The Accusers

An interesting picture of Satan's activity is revealed in the last book of the Bible:

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. 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!"¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Revelation 12:7–12 (ESV).

The enemy of our souls is depicted as a great dragon, doing warfare against believers. He and his angels (the demons) have been thrown down to earth, and are in their final battle against their great enemy (God). The dragon is enraged because his time is short and he knows it. He is described not as a tempter or a deceiver, but as an accuser. He does battle by accusing the brothers day and night before God.

Satan's accusations in Job

The book of Job describes Satan in his work of accusation. He came before God and accused Job of being faithful only because he was being protected and blessed. He told the Lord,

Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.¹⁰¹

Whomever God commends, the accusers condemn. Charles Swindoll paraphrases this text as “Look, God, talk about kid glove treatment! The man gets penthouse perks.”¹⁰² The enemy of our souls has an extremely negative attitude about human beings. He does not believe in human potential, and explains away all human accomplishment.

Satan challenged the Lord to “stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.”¹⁰³ Satan was actually asking the Lord to inflict Job in order to reveal what he was sure would be his true character.” Because the believer belongs to God, Satan must operate within God’s sovereignty and cannot function beyond what God allows.”¹⁰⁴ The

¹⁰¹ Job 1:9–11 (ESV).

¹⁰² Charles R. Swindoll, “Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance” (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009) 10.

¹⁰³ Job 2:5 (ESV).

¹⁰⁴ John MacArthur, “1, 2, 3, John Jude” (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005) 75.

book of Job partly answers the questions we all have about why the innocent suffer. Sometimes the reasons for suffering have nothing to do with personal sin. Sometimes suffering is allowed in order for the Lord to prove to Satan and his demons that their accusations are false.

Joshua, the High Priest

One of Zechariah's prophetic visions begins this way:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?"¹⁰⁵

Here again Satan is shown to believe the worst about a man of God. The vision goes on to describe Joshua as a man clothed with filthy garments, but God proceeds to clothe him in purified ones. This reveals a very important thing about demonic accusation. The demons are often partly right. The difference is that they do not see us after grace.

Whenever the unseen accusers target us, our best defense is not to try to prove them wrong with a history lesson. We fail too often for that to be an effective strategy. Our best defenses against accusations that we are not who we should be are the following:

Remind the accusers that our relationship with God is through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He is our atoning sacrifice. Even the filthiest sin can be washed clean by means of the blood of Christ.

Remind the accusers that the Holy Spirit chooses to reside in us. In spite of the fact that our actions sometimes grieve him, he is faithful. It is his faithfulness that is the key to our complete sanctification and ultimate glorification.

¹⁰⁵ Zechariah 3:1–2 (ESV).

Remind the accusers that God is infinite. He already sees our future, and so he relates to us on the basis of that future. It will do no good to tell God about our present shortcomings when he already foresees us living in holiness for billions of years. Our destiny is already settled in God's mind.

Jesus' Prayer for Peter

Jesus had told Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."¹⁰⁶ Jesus was aware that a battle was going to ensue in which Peter's commitment was going to be challenged. Peter was going to fail, and deny even knowing Christ. But Jesus promised to bring Peter through that time, and use him afterward. Often, believers are convinced that once they fail in a particular area that their witness is forever marred in that area. This incident shows that times of failure need not weaken our faith. Grace operates in a person's life when she allows God to rescue her.

The Intimidators

When all else fails, Satan and his demons are prepared to manifest themselves visibly, or through some display of power, in order to prevent people from learning and living the truth. They prey upon the fears of believers and unbelievers alike. Paul told Timothy that "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."¹⁰⁷ The demons are uncomfortable around people that they cannot control through fear. For that reason, when people are close to the gospel as unbelievers, or close to living the victory that they have in Christ as believers, demons will manifest.

¹⁰⁶ Luke 22:31-32 (ESV).

¹⁰⁷ 2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV).

This fact is a condemnation upon modern western society. The very fact that one does not see evidence of demonic manifestation on a regular basis in the modern world tells against our claim to spiritual superiority. It does not mean that we have the spirit world under control. It means that the demonic realm has us under control. Manifestation reveals the truth of demons' existence. They do not want to do that because they are more comfortable working in the background, and convincing people that evil is inherent within them and that there is no remedy for the suffering it causes.

The Christ of the Gospels

When Jesus appeared on the scene in the Gospels, he came in complete awareness of the demonic presence, and with power to overpower it. When people saw that someone was capable of dealing with demonic oppression and possession, they “brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word.”¹⁰⁸ These were not people with merely psychological problems, or brain illnesses. They were people under the control of spirit-beings. Jesus did not counsel them, or hold therapy sessions. He cast the demons out. In a society where demonic oppression and possession is denied *a priori*, such victims have to be put away because modern science cannot treat them. Jesus was under no such restriction. He was able to properly diagnose and treat the cause of these people's suffering.

The church in the west today must rediscover this gift. In fact, it is part of what makes us distinctive as a religious body. Christ called his disciples together “and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out.”¹⁰⁹ That authority has never been rescinded. We do our society and our planet an injustice when we disregard this fundamental aspect of our existence. Christ was *known* as one who had power over demons, and he intended

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 8:16 (ESV).

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 10:1 (ESV).

for us to be *known* for that as well. Across the world today, in cultures deep in the depression of demonic bondage, some believers stand out as rays of hope because they do not fear the Intimidators. The church in the west is not seen as the solution to this kind of problem, but we can be.

In Jesus' day, the people took note of his teaching *because* it was more than just ideas. He backed up his words with power, so "they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.'"¹¹⁰ His acts of deliverance drew the people to his words. When he said that God loved them, they could believe it, because they had seen him manifest God's love by healing and delivering people from demons. That is what deliverance ministry is for. It is not intended to promote the minister but to verify the message. Sometimes today, people get involved in deliverance ministries for the wrong reason. Deliverance is intended to advance the gospel, not to overshadow it.

Deliverance is designed to reveal who Christ is. When the demons encountered Christ in the Gospels, they recognized who he was. The Bible says, "whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.'"¹¹¹ That is the essence of the church's authority against demons today. It is not a magical power invested in us. It is the reality of who our Savior is that makes the demons afraid. For that reason, any born-again believer can oppose a demon. One does not have to be properly taught and pre-conditioned. All one really has to know is who Jesus is.

Deliverance overcomes bondage and frees people for productive ministry. Many of the women who supported Jesus' public ministry were free to do so because he had freed them from demonic bondage. Demons do not really want to kill us as much as they want to keep us in bondage to worldliness so that we are unproductive in kingdom living. If worldliness loses its charm,

¹¹⁰Mark 1:27 (ESV).

¹¹¹Mark 3:11 (ESV).

the demons will seek to keep us distracted with fear by physically manifesting. The only thing that prevents them from doing so more often is the knowledge that manifesting removes them from the category of things that do not really exist.

How a demon can manifest

Demons manifest as departed human spirits regularly. That explains why practically everybody had a ghost story. These ghosts are not really the spirits of dead people. They merely pretend to be. They can do a convincing job because they have observed those they choose to imitate prior to their deaths. Christians who are aware of this tactic can immediately dismiss these visitations and send the demons back where they came from with a failed mission.

Demons can also manifest as monsters that exist in public imagination. They take advantage of fear and seek to maintain an atmosphere of fear. There are remedies against any such paralyzing fear: often merely mentioning the name of Christ, or the power of his blood will send the demons away with a taste of their own medicine. Demons fear Jesus more than anything. They are aware that he will bring about their destruction at the end of the age.

Dabbling in the occult

Some people open themselves up to demonic attack by dabbling in the occult or getting too interested in paranormal phenomena. Even Christians can do this. Some have argued that it is impossible for a true Christian to become oppressed by a demon because he has the Holy Spirit within. This is faulty reasoning. True Christians are attacked by spirits all the time; the presence of the Holy Spirit does not prevent it. Also, these demons are persons. Believers are free to communicate with these persons, although doing so is not wise.

Levels of influence

There are levels of influence for demons, from the lowest (the attack) to the highest (possession). Giving in to fear (or curiosity) leads to more loss of control, until one is completely under the demon's control. At any point up until complete possession, a person may get freedom by professing Christ. The higher the level of influence, the more likely a person may need the help of others in breaking away.

The reality of the spirit realm

Some general conclusions are in order before leaving the subject of the spirit realm.

1. Angels and demons do exist. They are not figments of the imagination.
2. Angels have been commissioned to serve humanity, particularly those who will inherit eternal life.
3. Demons have a variety of functions and manifestations. Their attacks can be categorized as follows:
 TEMPTATION
 DECEPTION
 ACCUSATION
 INTIMIDATION
4. Demons do most of their work in darkness. That is, they function without the awareness of those on whom they are working.
5. Demons can manifest, but seek to work usually without doing so. Manifesting removes the illusion that they do not exist.

SO GREAT A SALVATION (Looking ahead to issue XLIII/2)

by Rev. Jefferson Vann

- The theme for the next issue will be soteriology, looking at the doctrines of salvation.
- If you find anything written on soteriology, feel free to review it, pro, and/or con.
- Letters to the editor will be read, and will probably be printed, unless they simply say — in a lot of words — that you disagree with something someone else said. But, if you take the time to interact with something you have read here, we would love to print that!
- Reviews of Advent Christian or conditionalist writings are always welcomed.
- Any biblical or theological papers (regardless of topic) are also encouraged.

PLEASE SUBMIT ALL LETTERS, ARTICLES OR REVIEWS
BY EMAIL TO jeffersonvann@yahoo.com AND SPECIFY
WHICH ISSUE THE ARTICLE IS INTENDED FOR OR
WHICH ARTICLE THE LETTER IS RESPONDING TO.