

Satan (Part 2)

Satan, Our Enemy: Understanding Satan's Modus Operandi

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In last week's sermon, we saw that we have powerful, cunning, and (I might say) implacable enemies that are large in number. They are invisible. They are supernatural. They are occupying seats of authority over this earth to which they are restrained. Our spiritual struggle is largely with them and it is our responsibility to overcome them, even as Jesus overcame Satan.

We also saw that the struggle is actually weighted in our favor on the basis of four things:

1. The good angels far outnumber the bad. There is at least a 2:1 ratio.
2. The demons greatly fear God. They tremble before Him.
3. They are a house divided. They cannot get their act together. This is certainly reflected in society when we understand that the governments of man are very largely influenced by these unseen, spiritual powers that are actually ruling over the nations. The nations are at one another's throats and they cannot get along with one another. They are simply reflecting the driving spirits behind them.
4. Most important of all is that God has set limits as to what they can do, as the book of Job clearly shows. Remember that Satan complained that God had set a hedge about Job and therefore Job was protected. God has done pretty much the same thing for you and me.

Today we are going to begin to look into the ploys Satan uses in his warfare. I use the term warfare because I want to emphasize that we (whether we realize it or not) have been thrust into a desperate struggle brought on by our calling from God.

Think about this: we are the heirs of salvation; our inheritance is the earth. But this earth just so happens to be the first estate of the original inhabitants—angels who have become demons. They look upon us as invaders and they are going to defend it even though God has already judged them as disqualified because of their behavior.

We are intruders into their space. Now, it's not really their space, it's ours. But yet they are acting like it is still theirs. God hasn't seen fit to get them out yet. We know from prophecy that it is going to occur, but they are still here, we are also here, and there is only so much territory to go around. They don't want us here, but we want to be here. Obviously, that is going to lead to clashes.

II Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal

but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

We're not carrying on a "worldly" war, but the battle for us is no less real. We have got to understand that we are not fighting for material success, earthly power, or prestige; we are not even trying to make our enemies look bad. The real issue for our life is the victory or defeat of God's purpose for us.

We have to understand that we have merciless, implacable, and powerful spiritual enemies, so that such things as human cleverness, ingenuity, organizing ability, eloquent arguments, reliance on charm, or forcefulness of personality are simply not the answer. Those things may impress men, but believe me; demons are not impressed at all. Those things are the weapons of carnality.

The good news is that the Captain of our salvation has already defeated their Goliath. Their leader is defeated. He is beaten and the Captain of our salvation lives in us.

We find from these verses that the enemy invades our mind, our imagination, and he does this with opinions, with convictions and feelings that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. The words that are used in verse 5 in the New King James are "casting down arguments." Some Bibles say "reasoning." Others say "convictions" or "opinions." We could even inject here "feelings." Whatever the application is, they exalt themselves against the knowledge of God.

These things that they invade our mind with are designed to affect or alter our behavior. That's what Satan did in the Garden of Eden. The reasonings are the key to understanding. God created you and me with the ability to reason. But what line of reason do we follow? The key to following the right line of reasoning is this phrase, "against the knowledge of God," because the thoughts that invade our mind coming from this evil, wicked, subtle, deceitful spiritual leader are going to lead us to exalt our reasoning against the knowledge of God.

This knowledge is not primarily about God, but rather the knowledge of the person of God. The knowledge about God is certainly included, but what he wants to exalt our thoughts about is the knowledge of the person of God.

Why would he want to do that? Because we have a relationship with a person—He is a being with personality, character, and a wonderful wholesome way of life that produces every good thing. Satan tries to destroy that relationship by getting us to doubt either the Person and His goodness or the rightness and goodness of His promises and way of life.

II Corinthians 2:11 Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

I think it is the King James that translates devices as "wiles." We'll use some synonyms so that we get a clearer grasp. We could also translate devices or wiles as "contrivances, techniques, stratagems, plans, procedures, plottings, or schemes." He has devices; he has ways that are designed to achieve a particular goal.

A device, stratagem, technique, or contrivance might be thought of as being a tool made to carry out a certain function. But in this context (remembering what we just read in II Corinthians 10) the implication is that the device is primarily mental.

Now indeed they are. He is clever. He is crafty. He is the possessor of ingenious subtlety, but he also has a modus operandi that presents us with clues as to his influence and tends to give him away so that it can render much of his cleverness inoperative and make him easier to defeat.

The idea is to catch him as he is beginning to use his device, twisting us mentally to the line of reasoning that he wants us to follow. If we can catch it as it begins, we will not be entrapped by it. We know that Adam and Eve did not catch it and as a result they were led astray.

One of a Christian's primary defenses against Satan of course has to be a prior awareness of his modus operandi—particularly (I might say right in this context here) his evil desire to turn good into evil. Perhaps no cunning could be more devilish than to do such a thing. But right in this context, Paul is alluding that Satan can get a person through a spiritual quality that is good.

II Corinthians 2:6-8 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man [The punishment was that the man was disfellowshipped, excommunicated. However, he had repented.], so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.

When you put that together with verse 11, what Paul is saying is that a godly sorrow unto repentance can actually give Satan the opportunity to turn this person's feelings about his sin into an abnormal self-pity, which will destroy that despairing person's relationship with the church and with God by turning that person into a bitter cynic. He is that clever.

It doesn't end there. In addition to that, he can turn the righteous indignation of those who were offended by the man's sin originally into a bitter self-righteousness if they don't forgive and forget and go on. So he gets people going and coming unless they are aware that he is able to turn something that is good into a ploy by which he destroys that person's relationship with God and with the church.

These are not the only weapons that Satan has in his arsenal. Remember that we are involved in a war and in warfare; a general will employ every kind of ploy, device, tool, or contrivance to rout the enemy. A general will use decoys, infiltration, subversion, propaganda, rumors, misleading leaks of information, and sometimes a frontal attack with diversions on the flanks.

Now Satan is no different, but we are especially warned of his subtlety. He creates distractions and allusions to deflect us from reaching our goal. He has the ability to make things that are in God's purpose unimportant (like material things or vanity) seem important, while eternal, spiritual things he makes seem unimportant, unnecessary, and unrealistic.

This knowledge of what he is like would be unnecessary if he could not affect us after baptism. Despite his earlier defeat at the hand of God and (I might also add to this) his defeat by our

David, Jesus Christ, he is still seeking to destroy God. Even if he fails at that, he still wants to destroy God's purpose of having us born into His family. Now how?

Let's go back to I John 4. Satan's major public effort is through (what we call today) disinformation. He also uses attitudes, but for the purpose of this sermon, we are mostly going to be concentrating on disinformation. Disinformation is a lie that is plausible enough on the surface, it seems as though it might be true.

One of John's methods of teaching is to present contrasts by which one can see the truth and make right decisions. He uses terms and contrasts such as the evil one against God, or the spirit of error against truth, or the false prophet (the anti-Christ) against the true.

The context at the beginning of chapter 4 is false prophets. There is a great deal of information against false prophets, as there should be, because they are the ones through whom Satan gives his lies most of the time.

I John 4:1-3 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the anti-Christ, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

The definition of a prophet is simply "one who speaks for another." You might recall in the book of Exodus that God designated Moses as His prophet. In other words, Moses was going to speak for God. A little bit later (believe it or not), Moses was designated as God before Pharaoh, and Aaron was Moses' prophet.

The indication here is that the prophet was going to have words given to him by another that he was then going to speak before those to whom he was sent. In the case where Moses was appointed as God before Pharaoh, Moses would say the words to Aaron and then Aaron in turn would say the words to Pharaoh. We have Moses putting the words into Aaron's mouth and Aaron then speaking them to Pharaoh.

Put that back into I John 4. The unspoken implication in chapter 4:1-3 is that the prophet is inspired or motivated by one for whom he speaks. At the beginning of verse 1, John literally says in the Greek, "Stop believing every spirit." Now wait a minute. I haven't had any spirits speaking to me. Have you?

We have to understand the way in which John used the word spirit. I don't know whether you are aware, but the word spirit is used eight different ways in the Bible. According to Thayer's Lexicon in this context it refers to, "One in whom a spirit is manifest or embodied, hence one actuated by a spirit whether divine or demonic."

These spirits then, in this context, are thus human beings actuated by demons or the Holy Spirit of God. It could be either. These spirits that John is talking about would be the teachers, the pastors, or the evangelists who were circulating around the local churches of God. I want you to

notice these anti-Christ; these false prophets were speaking to the congregations of the true church. That's clear right in the context.

The exhortation to you and me and to those people in that day is that they were to test whether these spirits are so. It is a positive testing just like was given to the Bereans in the book of Acts. They tested whether these things were so.

He is saying to these people, "Don't treat the teacher, the preacher, the pastor, the evangelist as a heretic until he shows himself to be one." But they are supposed to put the person to the test. We have to take this advice because John's powerful warning here is that though the inspired teacher or speaker is the means by which the revelation, or the word, or the preaching comes, we must know that the supernatural one behind that speaker may not be divine.

The spirit is revealed by the message or the doctrine of the prophet. Remember Thayer's definition. I'll quote that to you again. "Spirit refers to one in whom a spirit is manifest [it's a human being] or embodied, hence one actuated by a spirit whether divine or demonical." It is up to you and me to make the test as to whether this person is speaking the truth.

We're going to go back to Deuteronomy, because I want you to see this is exactly parallel to what God warned through Moses in chapter 13. God expects His people to be as well informed as they possibly can be from His word and to use His word to evaluate what they are being taught.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet . . .

Do you see what's coming out of the prophet's mouth? Something that is false. Who is that prophet speaking for, what spirit, what supernatural spirit? It is not the spirit of God, but rather it is a demon speaking through a human being inspiring and motivating that person. God is permitting it and He expects His people to put that person to the test.

Deuteronomy 13:3-5 or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you [Doesn't that line right up with Satan's devices?] from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst."

This is serious business, brethren, very serious business as the context here shows very clearly. The important thing is to see that God expects us to be able to discern who the spirit is that is motivating the speaker. The test is to see whether we will remain loyal to God—loyal in terms of keeping His commandments.

What that means is that the listener better have a pretty good working knowledge of God—knowledge of God takes us right back to II Corinthians 10: 5, where Paul warned that the reasonings will exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. It's beginning to become very clear the devices that Satan is going to use to turn us aside. It is also beginning to become very clear what we need to be able to thwart those devices. We need to have a good working knowledge of God—not things about God so much (that's certainly included), but the knowledge of God the Person, the Being, with whom we have a relationship.

Also here, Deuteronomy confirms that these false prophets (some of them, but not all of them) will be able to do miracles, which is what Paul confirmed in II Thessalonians 2, which is also what John confirmed in Revelation 11. We see that what is in the New Testament is built upon what God had already showed in the Old Testament—that the *modus operandi* is going to be something that is carried through from one covenant to the other.

We have to understand that such signs—the ability to do miracles—are not of themselves indications of authority from God. What they do must be combined with teaching that is in agreement with God's already revealed will.

One final group of scriptures to show you how serious this is in the eyes of God, we will read just a little bit further. Look at how close these relationships are.

Deuteronomy 13:6-9 "If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him...."

It is serious business.

Let's go to Jeremiah 14. I'm going to be reading a great deal from the first sixteen verses from this chapter, because I want to show you why this is so important to God. We want to see what the affect of turning away from God through the acceptance of a message from a false minister might be. There are other chapters that I could have used, but I think this is abundantly clear.

Jeremiah 14:1 The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the droughts.

Look at what is happening. The land is suffering from a drought. Do you think the people

connected drought with obedience to the message of a false minister? I don't think they did.

Jeremiah 14:2-6 "Judah mourns, and her gates languish; they mourn for the land, and the cry of Jerusalem has gone up. Their nobles have sent their lads for water; they went to the cisterns and found no water. They returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded and covered their heads. Because the ground is parched, for there was no rain in the land, the plowmen were ashamed; they covered their heads. Yes, the deer also gave birth in the field, but left because there was no grass. [Wildlife is affected.] And the wild donkeys stood in the desolate heights; they sniffed at the wind like jackals; their eyes failed because there was no grass."

Jeremiah 14:7-9 O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your name's sake; for our backslidings are many, we have sinned against You. O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble, why should You be like a stranger in the land [God's far off], and like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should You be like a man astonished . . .

Jeremiah 14:10-14 Thus says the Lord to this people: "Thus they have loved to wander; they have not restrained their feet. Therefore the Lord does not accept them; He will remember their iniquity now, and punish their sins." Then the Lord said to me, " Do not pray for this people, for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry". . . . Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.'" And the Lord said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them...."

The spirit that was speaking to them was not divine. It was supernatural though. The people submitted to it because they did not put the prophet to the test to see whether or not his teaching was in harmony with what had already been revealed through God's messenger Moses.

Jeremiah 14:14-16 ". . . they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not be in this land'; 'By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed! And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword [It was going to get worse. They were going to be invaded.]; they will have no one to bury them [you might say the ultimate in shame], them nor their wives, their sons nor their daughters, for I will pour their wickedness on them.'"

God blames the plight of the nation on the false prophets who were listened to. What did they do? They lulled the people into complacency, which led them to believe that all was well when it wasn't well. They preached to them smooth things because the people had itching ears. They liked the things that were taught to them, but it was not the word of God. God says they were lies given in His name. If one listens to them, then it's the same thing as the blind leading the blind and they both fall in the ditch.

Let's go back to Matthew 7:15. Here we are right in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus warns:

Matthew 7:15-20 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

The description here is very apt—wolves in sheep's clothing, that is, they appear on the outside to be something they are not. I am convinced that when Jesus uttered this He was thinking of the church and false ministers who would be, in the future (that is from the time of Jesus), insinuating themselves into the church by appearing to be sheep within the sheepfold.

Jesus used that terminology in regard to His relationship with the church. He was the Shepherd; we are His sheep. Here we have wolves (false ministers) who look like sheep, but it's hypocrisy. They only look that way on the outside.

He tells us we will know them by their fruits. The fruit that is produced is not something that necessarily will appear very quickly. But Christ guarantees that over a period of time the church will be stripped of its true spiritual vitality in terms of the character that will be produced within the flock.

What is He saying? The implication is (right in the context) that Jesus is connecting belief with practice. You believe a certain set of doctrines and you are going to practice something because of the teaching. Another way of putting it might be connecting creed, that is, the religious creed or the dogma that a group is following, will produce a certain kind of conduct by the people. Belief and practice, creed and conduct—Jesus is saying here are vitality connected. In other words, the teacher cannot hide what he is going to produce. Eventually it will come out.

Their false philosophies, no matter how attractive at first sight they may appear, will in the long run be exposed for what they really are. That's why I read those verses in the New Testament. All I did was leap from the warning in Deuteronomy 13 to just one series of verses that clearly show the effect of following the teaching of a false prophet.

The land was in drought. How many people would carnally connect a drought with obedience to a false minister? Not very many people would do that because those people would be thinking

carnally anyway and they would say, "It's just part of the cycle of things. It happens every so many years." They're not thinking that there might be a spiritual cause to it, that God is concerned about the well being of His people, that He had brought the drought in order to make them think about why this is happening, and the cause for concern is spiritual in nature.

Do you think any of the Presidential candidates here in the United States are going to make an appeal to the United States citizens that the cause of our problems in the United States is spiritual in nature? The closest they dare come is this flap over family values.

If President Bush or candidate Clinton said before a group of people that the reason we are having troubles in the United States is that we need to repent and get back to our God, they would be laughed into shame and contempt. The reason we are seeing the immorality in the United States is the effect of listening to false ministers!

To those of us who believe God, we can make the connection easily. My point here is not to point the finger of scorn at Americans or Canadians or anybody else, because we understand their disobedience and Satan blinds them. My concern is that Satan doesn't trip us up by falling into the trap.

I think we need to examine, just briefly, what Jesus was talking about here in terms of what the false minister would not preach. He does not explicitly say what their teaching will be. But brethren, look where this was placed by Matthew and I have to believe God inspired Matthew to remember what Jesus' words were right after He uttered that thing in verse 12—which is the golden rule. Verse 13 admonishes us to:

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

That leads right into the teaching about false prophets. To me, reading that right in its context, I would have to say that what Jesus said about false ministers demands that the false ministers will neither acknowledge or teach the narrow way that leads to life; the narrow way that is going to lead to persecution. Instead they will do just what God shows the Old Testament false prophets did and teach peace, peace—the smooth, easy, and broad way.

In other words, "You don't have to make any sacrifices in your obedience to God." I think that it is so interesting that in the last five or six years in the church so many things have been liberalized. Do you think we're getting away from the straight and the narrow, the difficult and the sacrificial way?

With that in mind, let's go back to II Corinthians 11. We will continue with the context that we began the sermon with. After mentioning Satan in chapter 10, Paul opens chapter 11 with:

II Corinthians 11:1-2 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may

present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

We're going to begin to see here that Paul's concern was that these people would be led aside, deceived by Satan, away from their spiritual purity. They would lose their chastity. They would begin fornicating, spiritually fornicating with the world.

II Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds [remember arguments, reasonings] may be corrupted from the simplicity [the straight, the narrow] that is in Christ.

Here we are beginning a section that must be the ultimate of not being what one appears outwardly to be. My reference is to the wolves in sheep's clothing, to false prophets or false ministers, but here the title used is apostle instead of prophet, but the sense is the same.

Paul is not speaking about a prophet who foretells the future, but simply a minister (an apostle he calls them) who speaks under inspiration. He, like the apostle John, is warning the Corinthians that the inspiration may not be coming from God.

It seems pretty clear that the teaching of these false prophets, false ministers, and false apostles is right inside the church. That's kind of mind boggling, but these people are hearing them. Paul's fear is that they might be diverted from the simplicity. His fear is well grounded because Satan is always there and there is therefore the possibility of attack—an attack against our single-hearted devotion to Christ.

Remember the parable Jesus gave of the sower and the seed? The sower went forth to sow, he cast his seeds out, and some of them fell in reasonably good ground. Others fell on stony ground. But in at least a couple of cases, the seed germinated, took root, and then things began to happen. In one case it was the cares of the world, another the deceitfulness of riches, and another the lust of other things entered in and they choked the words.

Those things of and by themselves are not sin, but they can be turned into means, contrivances, tools, devices by which Satan is able to use them to deflect us away from the simplicity that is in Christ—the straight and the narrow way.

What has been pointed out to us from G