



Applied Faith Men's Bible Study

South Hills Baptist Church

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Satan in Our Lives

Lesson #1

Lesson #44 overall

. . . that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs. (2 Corinthians 2:11)

One of the most sobering facts about life is that all humans have a supernatural enemy whose aim is to use pain and pleasure to make us blind, stupid, and miserable — forever. The Bible calls him “the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world . . . the accuser” (Revelation 12:9–10), “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31), and “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

He is our “adversary [who] prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Yet, in the most appalling and unwitting bondage, the whole world willingly “follows the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). At his most successful, his subjects march obliviously to destruction, and take as many with them as they can.

The “good warfare” (1 Timothy 1:18) that I wrote about under the title “Awake and at War” includes the daily resistance of this enemy (1 Peter 5:9; James 4:7), the daily refusal to give him an opportunity (Ephesians 4:27), and the daily stand against his schemes (Ephesians 6:11).

Satan’s Leash — and Impending Doom

God is sovereign over Satan. The devil does not have a free hand in this world. He is on a leash, so that he can do no more than God permits. In effect, he must get permission — as in the case of Simon Peter, where Jesus discloses, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has asked to have you, that he might sift you like wheat” (Luke 22:31). And the case of Job: “The Lord said to Satan, “Behold, Job is in your hand; only spare his life” (Job 2:6).

So evidently God sees the ongoing role of Satan as essential for his purposes in the world, since, if God willed, Satan would be thrown into the lake of fire now, instead of at the end of the age. “The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and . . . will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10). His complete defeat is coming and sure. But not yet.

Unwitting Servant of Our Sanctification

God intends that part of our preparation for heaven be a life of warfare with hell. He calls it a “good warfare” (1 Timothy 1:18) and a “good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12). It is good, not because we might be killed (which we might! — Revelation 2:10), but because these fire-fights refine the gold of our faith (1 Peter 1:7), in life and death.

God is the great General in this warfare. He has given us the walkie-talkie of prayer to call for help: “Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times” (Ephesians 6:17–18).

He sees behind enemy lines, and knows exactly the strategies that will be used against us. He has written them down in a wartime manual “so that we would not be outwitted by Satan.” The reason we will not be outwitted is that “we are not ignorant of his designs” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Primer on Satan’s Strategies

If you need a refresher for what those “designs” are, here is a summary. May God make you a mighty warrior! May he “train your hands for war and your fingers for battle” (Psalm 144:1).

1. Satan lies, and is the father of lies.

“When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). The first time Satan appears in the Bible in Genesis 3, the first words on his lips are suspicious of the truth (“Did God say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?”). And the second words on his lips were a subtle falsehood (“You will not

die”). John says that Satan “has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44). We are dealing with the essence of falsehood and deception.

2. He blinds the minds of unbelievers.

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:4). So he not only speaks what is false. He hides what is true. He keeps us from seeing the treasure of the gospel. He lets us see facts, even proofs, but not preciousness.

3. He masquerades in costumes of light and righteousness.

In 2 Corinthians 11:13–15, Paul says that some people are posing as apostles who are not. He explains like this: “Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”

In other words, Satan has servants who profess enough truth to join the church, and from inside teach what Paul calls “doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1). Jesus says they will be like wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15). Acts 20:30 says they will not spare the flock, but will draw people away to destruction. Without God’s gift of discernment (Philippians 1:9), our love will be suckered into stupidity.

4. Satan does signs and wonders.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:9, the last days are described like this: “The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power, and with signs and wonders of the lie.” That’s my awkward translation.

Some translate it “with false signs and wonders.” But this makes the signs and wonders look unreal. In fact, some people do say that Satan can only fake miracles. I doubt it. And even if it’s true, his fake is going to be good enough to look real to almost everybody.

One reason I doubt that Satan can only fake his miracles is that in Matthew 24:24 Jesus describes the last days like this: “False Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.” There is no hint that these “signs and wonders” will be tricks.

Let your confidence be grounded in something far deeper than any supposed inability of Satan to do signs and wonders. Even real signs and wonders in the service of anti-Christian assertions, prove nothing, even when they are done “in the name of Jesus.” “Lord, Lord, did we not do many mighty works in your name?” To which Jesus will reply, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matthew 7:22–23). The problem was not that the signs and wonders weren’t real, but that they were in the service of sin.

5. Satan tempts people to sin.

This is what he did unsuccessfully to Jesus in the wilderness — he wanted him to abandon the path of suffering and obedience (Matthew 4:1–11). This is what he did successfully to Judas in the last hours of Jesus’s life (Luke 22:3–6). And in 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul warns against this for all the believers: “I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”

6. Satan plucks the word of God out of people's hearts and chokes faith.

Jesus told the parable of the four soils in Mark 4:1–9. In it, the seed of the word of God is sown, and some falls on the path and birds quickly take it away. He explains in verse 15, “Satan immediately comes and takes away the word which was sown in them.” Satan snatches the word because he hates faith which the word produces (Romans 10:17).

Paul expresses his concern for the faith of the Thessalonians like this: “I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain” (1 Thessalonians 3:5). Paul knew that Satan’s design is to choke off the faith of people who have heard the word of God.

7. Satan causes some sickness and disease.

Jesus healed a woman once who was bent over and could not straighten herself. When some criticized him for doing that on the Sabbath, he said, “Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” (Luke 13:16). Jesus saw Satan as the one who had caused this disease.

In Acts 10:38, Peter described Jesus as one who “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.” In other words, the devil often oppresses people with illness. This too is one of his designs.

But don’t make the mistake of saying every sickness is the work of the devil. To be sure, even when a “thorn in the flesh” is God’s design for our sanctification, it also may be the “messenger of Satan” (2 Corinthians 12:7). But there are other instances in which the disease is

solely attributed to God's design without reference to Satan: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3). Jesus feels no need to bring Satan in as the culprit in his own merciful designs.

8. Satan is a murderer.

Jesus said to those who were planning to kill him, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth" (John 8:44). John says, "Do not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother" (1 John 3:12). Jesus told the blameless church at Smyrna, "The devil is about to throw some of you into prison. . . . Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

To put it in a word, Satan is blood-thirsty. Christ came into the world that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). Satan comes that he might destroy life wherever he can and in the end make it eternally miserable.

9. Satan fights against the plans of missionaries.

Paul tells of how his missionary plans were frustrated in 1 Thessalonians 2:17–18: "We endeavored the more eagerly, and with great desire, to see you face to face; because we wanted to come to you . . . but Satan hindered us." Satan hates evangelism and discipleship, and he will throw every obstacle he can in the way of missionaries and people with a zeal for evangelism.

10. Satan accuses Christians before God.

Revelation 12:10 says, "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.'" Satan's defeat is sure. But his accusations haven't ceased.

It is the same with us as it was with Job. Satan says to God about us, They don't really love you; they love your benefits. "Stretch out your hand and touch all that [they have], and [they] will curse you to your face" (Job 1:11). Their faith isn't real. Satan accuses us before God, as he did Job. But it is a glorious thing that followers of Jesus have an advocate who "always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

Satan Will Not Win

Those are some of Satan's designs. The path to victory in this warfare is to hold fast to Christ who has already dealt the decisive blow.

1 John 3:8: "The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil."

Hebrews 2:14: "Christ took on human nature that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil."

Colossians 2:15: "God disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him." In other words, the decisive blow was struck at Calvary.

Mark 3:27: "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man."

Revelation 20:10 says one day the warfare will be over: “The devil . . . [will be] thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone . . . and will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” (See Matthew 8:29; 25:41)

Resist!

James says, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you!” (James 4:7). How do we do that? Here is how they did it according to Revelation 12:11: “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.” They embraced the triumph of Christ by his blood. They spoke that truth in faith. They did not fear death. And they triumphed.

The New Testament highlights prayer as the pervasive accompaniment of every battle. “Take . . . the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication” (Ephesians 6:17–18).

As the close of this age draws near, and Satan rages, Jesus calls us to wartime prayer: “Watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36). Similarly, Peter makes an urgent call to end-time prayer: “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers” (1 Peter 4:7).

Even Jesus fought against the devil on our behalf with the weapon of prayer. He said to Peter in Luke 22:31–32, “Satan has asked to have you that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.” So Jesus illustrates for us the opposition of a specific satanic threat with prayer.

And, of course, Jesus instructed us to make prayer a daily weapon for protection in general: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13). That is, deliver us from the successful temptation of the evil one. Do you confront the designs of the devil with the focused and determined power of prayer?

No Neutral Zone

The question is not whether you want to be in this war. Everyone is in it. Either we are defeated by the devil and thus following, like cattle to the slaughter, “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2), or we are resisting — “resist him, firm in your faith!” (1 Peter 5:9).

There is no neutral zone. You either triumph “by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony,” or you will be enslaved by Satan. Therefore, “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:3), and “wage the good warfare” (1 Timothy 1:18). Pray without ceasing!

The Lord Jesus is no less a warrior today than in the days of old. So I urge you again: Come to him as willing soldiers of the Prince of Peace and learn to say, “He trains my hands for war” (Psalm 144:1).

Application/Activity

Every night this week, starting tonight, walk through your house before you go to bed and pray over each room. Ask God to protect your family and to rid your house of Satan and his demons. Pray for your family's protection from the schemes of Satan and that God not allow any evil into your house.