

Unseen Enemies
November 25, 2018

We live in a world full of competing beliefs, values, religions, and philosophies. The ones that are radically different from our own are easy to spot and defend against. It is the ones that contain some Christian truth mixed with error that are harder to identify. We recognize the truth, but maybe not the error, especially if we don't know what kinds of things to watch out for.

The same was true 2,000 years ago. Paul wrote to Christians to warn them against teaching that sounded good but led away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 2:3-4, 8 (NIV) (I want you to fully know) "**Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.**

... See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Last week we looked at the false idea of adding Jesus to the Law of Moses. This week Paul warns against a different category of deception.

Colossians 2:18-19 (NIV) **Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head (Christ)...**

Now who would want us worshipping angels? It would be someone who hates Jesus and resists God. It is someone who wants to move us away from worshipping God, away from serving Jesus, away from the truth of the gospel. Who are they? They are unseen enemies. There are unseen spiritual beings in our world.

The Bible reveals to us three kinds of spiritual beings, seraphim (Is 6:2 & 6), cherubim (Gen 3:24;), and angels.

Angels are messengers, which is the meaning of their name. Angels, like humans, have free will to serve God or to rebel against Him. In fact, a significant number of angels have rebelled against God's authority. These angels are now called demons.

Yes, I believe in angels and demons. They are acknowledged all through the Bible. Jesus spoke of them as real. If you accept the Bible as the word of God, and you should, then you must believe in the reality of angels and demons. God can create spirit beings as easily as material beings. Our unseen enemies are demons.

But believe in them as the Bible depicts them, not as popular culture does. In the Middle ages, artists did us a disservice. They painted pictures based on Bible stories and teachings. And the devil appeared in some of these. But how to paint a creature that no one has seen?

They turned to oral descriptions of the Roman gods. With the acceptance of Christianity in the Roman empire, the old immoral Roman gods were now understood to actually be demons. One of these, Pan, was connected with immoral sexual activity. He was pictured as having the hindquarters, legs, and horns of a goat. This became the model for the artists.

They painted the devil as half man and half goat. Later pictures added wings and a forked tail. The earliest pictures painted the devil as blue in color. Over time most artists changed over to red because that color became associated with hell.

So this image became predominant when the devil was depicted in paintings and drawings. And that made him appear mythical, like fairies, elves, and goblins. Today many people believe in God, but not as many believe in the devil, partly because of these pictures of him in this form.

But what does the Bible say?

2 Corinthians 11:14 (NIV) Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

They can manifest themselves visibly if they choose, but otherwise they are invisible. If demons choose to appear to you, they are not going to appear in the popular image of the devil, half man and half goat. You would immediately recognize them as bad. No, like spies, they are going to appear as someone good, someone trustworthy, someone Christian. Their goal is to deceive you with fine-sounding arguments and half truths in order to distract you from Christ and the gospel.

Demons are smart, crafty, and powerful. They are much smarter and more powerful than we are.

Demons serve under their leader, known as the Devil, Beelzebub, or Satan. And there is much in the Bible about him and what he and his are trying to do. We would do well to pay heed to these passages. They cannot harm a Christian, but they lead us astray from the truth. This is the danger that the New Testament writers warn us of.

1 John 5:19 (NIV) We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

God is sovereign over the whole earth. But just as God allowed Satan to use his power to hurt Job, so today, demons have power to bring harm to those living on the earth. The apostle Paul also wrote of the danger that demons pose to the Christian.

Ephesians 6:11-12 (NIV) Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

John 13:2; 14:30; 16:11; Acts 5:3; 10:38; 26:18; 1 Corinthians 10:19-20; 2 Corinthians 2:11; 11:14;
Ephesians 2:1-2; 4:27; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; 1 Timothy 4:1; 5:15;
2 Timothy 2:26; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 2:13

This is the most direct statement in the Bible about the presence and danger of these spiritual bad guys. Note the language used to describe them: rulers, authorities, powers, spiritual forces of evil. Paul speaks of this also in Colossians, but not in plain language.

It is believed that Paul is writing of these demons who act behind the authorities when he uses the phrases "basic principles (or forces) of this world" (Col 2:8, 20) and "powers and authorities" (Col 2:15) in his Colossians letter.

Paul has given us much information about Jesus in this letter. His goal is to keep us focused on the good news of Jesus and so avoid anything or anyone who would lead us away from this good news. Let's look at what he says in verse 15.

Colossians 2:15 (NIV) And having disarmed the powers and authorities (demons), he (God) made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Jesus won many victories on the cross, not just providing the basis for our salvation. He also brought a major defeat to Satan. Jesus, in his death has broken the hold the devil had on our world, even over God's people. The devil is still running loose on planet earth, but his time is limited. When Jesus returns to the earth to take up his throne the devil will be locked up.

But Christians are protected from the kind of things we read of in the gospels. . In the gospels we see Satan harming Jews, making them sick, bringing suffering, indwelling them. But it is different for Christians. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Satan cannot harm in the presence of the Holy Spirit who now lives in us.

But there are other ways Satan can hurt us. He can do so by treachery. This is what Paul has written to warn them of. And it is this I need to focus on this morning.

Three ways Satan and demons are out to hurt the Christian.

Satan can counterfeit miracle-working Christs.

Matthew 24:23-25 (NIV) At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time.

Satan is powerful, able to do miracles.

The proof of where God is working is not miracles. In the Old Testament, God told the Israelites that if someone came forth pretending to be a prophet from God and predicted things that came true, that person might be a true prophet from God. That was the first test of a true prophet. But then, if that person said, "Let's go and worship something or someone other than Yahweh" that meant the person was NOT a true prophet sent from God. They were to ignore what the person taught and stone him to death.

Jesus warns us not to be swayed just by miracles. Demons have power to pretend to come from God. And if we listen to them, at some point they will try to direct us away

from Jesus and the gospel. They will try to get us focused on pleasure, the ways of the world, or corrupt the truths of God's word so that we get distracted from Jesus.

Satan uses his power to lure the naïve or foolish into the supernatural.

When the jets hit the twin towers and the pentagon, it shook people up. Our sense of security was shaken. Our enemies could get to us even here. The next day three families came to our church for the prayer service. None had ever been here before.

The mom in one family admitted that she had always thought she could control her life and that of her children. The bombings convinced her otherwise. In this realization she was ready to turn back to God. She had been raised in a Christian home, but had run from the Gospel in her teenage years.

After 9/11 others also turned to God. But others turned the other way. Instead of turning to God and His power, they started looking for a power they could control. This is one of the reasons some people are drawn to astrology, magic, witchcraft, and such supernatural things. They explore one or more of these kinds of things hoping to get more control over their lives.

But that isn't what happens. What happens is that they open themselves to the evil spiritual beings that are in the world. **Supernatural activities are neither innocent nor controllable and have no power in themselves.** There are no inanimate forces in the world.

Instead, there are intelligent beings who have power. God has supreme power. Demons have limited, but invisible superhuman powers. This is how they use them. When people involved themselves in supernatural activities, hoping to find power in them, demons work invisibly to perform small acts of power or miracles to fool the people to delve deeper. By experimenting in such things, you are opening yourself to the power of the devil. If you continue, you will eventually become enslaved to demons. Eventually the demon takes control of your will just as manipulative people enslave others to do their bidding. This is the process that sexual predators and abusers use.

Demons are the real power behind non-Christian religions, behind witchcraft, astrology, the New Age movement, Ouija boards, casting spells, interpreting omens, consulting mediums, palm reading, séances, and the pursuit of visions. God warned the Israelites to have nothing to do with such things. We see this power in Judas.

John 13:2 (NIV) The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus...

Exploring/experimenting in the supernatural will bring you under the influence of demons.

Satan encourages runaway emotions and passions.

The devil tempts us most when we are most vulnerable. We are most vulnerable when we are feeling strong emotions, like anger, bitterness, jealousy, lust, confusion,

discouragement, and more. Demons use strong emotions to lead you into sin. Look at the following warning.

Ephesians 4:26-27 (NIV) In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

Some people let their anger run rampant. Some let their anger lead them into the sins of bitterness, envy, jealousy, even revenge. This week on the news there were reported two local incidents of road rage. Both ended in people getting hurt. Road rage is anger that is unleashed.

The devil will tempt you to unleash your anger, unleash your lust, unleash your envy, unleash your discouragement. It is when we unleash such strong emotions and thoughts that we enter into sin and hurt ourselves or others. We need to stay focused on Jesus and His will to keep tamed our emotions and passions.

The devil is real. Don't make the mistake of laughing him off. Don't make the mistake of not believing he is real. He is as real as Jesus. Be aware of the danger he represents and let nothing distract you from the good news of Jesus Christ.