

SATAN AND HIS ACTIVITIES

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I. INTRODUCTION

"Satan" means different things to different people. To Rudolf Bultman he represents an ancient mythological conception of evil. To Paul Tillich he exemplifies the evil, which is undeniably part of our present social reality. To Karl Barth he epitomises the dynamic of nothingness, which threatens God's creative work.¹

At the mention of Satan some scoff and laugh, while others shrug and yawn. Many, if movie box-office receipts are any indication, are inquisitive and quite prepared to be frightened out of their wits. Then there are those who are very sure he is real and even more sure he is following them everywhere just waiting for the right opportunity to get them. Some Christians fall into this last category but most, at least in the Western world, are not sure what to think. Because they read their Bibles they believe he exists but somehow he lives and moves in a shadowy realm that seems far removed from everyday life at the end of the technologically sophisticated twentieth century.

However, if we take the Bible seriously, we must take Satan seriously. The Bible is never interested in raising the level of our idle curiosity and no where is this more true than with regards to Satan and the problem of evil in general. The Bible tells us about Satan because he is real and we need to know something about him if we are to glorify God and enjoy him forever. It presents him as a very personal threat to our eternal welfare. As a matter of fact, when it comes to Satan and his demons, we are totally dependent on God's special word revelation. Therefore, we need to hear what the Bible has to say and then carefully and prayerfully put it into practice.

II. HIS PERSON

Satan's very name introduces us to who he really is. It is derived from a Hebrew verb, which means, "to be or act as an adversary." This is exactly what Satan is. He is the adversary of God, and man who is made in his image, and especially those men and women who have been redeemed by God's Son Jesus Christ. The New Testament also refers to Satan in a wide variety of other ways, which further illuminate his sinister profile. The most common designation being "the devil" which means "the slanderer."

The Bible says very little about his origin. In the opening chapters of Job he is represented as a fallen angel who had access to the throne of God. The apostle John describes him as the archetypal sinner who has been sinning from the beginning (1 Jn.3:8). When he makes his Old Testament debut he proceeds to corrupt the world God has made by engineering the deflection of the original human couple (Gn.3:1 cf. 2 Co.11:3).

His wicked presence in the beginning does not mean he is eternal nor self-existent. The Bible leaves no room for pagan dualistic notions of good and evil. Satan, like everything else apart from God, including angels, has been created by Christ, and as a creature is constantly dependent on Christ for his existence (Col.1:16-17). This, however, is not to suggest that he was corrupt when he came from the hand of God. In Jn.8:44 Jesus describes him as one who did not hold (or stand in) the truth. "This seems to indicate a fall from the truth in which he once 'stood' (RV), in which case the following clause, 'for there is no truth in him,' indicates not why he fell, but how we know he fell. The explanation for his present lack of truth is that he fell from the truth long ago."²

When the angels were created is not clear. Some believe they were created along with everything else during the six days mentioned in the opening chapters of Genesis, but this is not explicitly stated in the creation account. Others feel this is unnecessarily restrictive and fails to account for passages like Job 38:7 which speaks of the morning stars singing together and all the angels (literally: the sons of God) shouting for joy when the Lord laid the earth's foundation. If the angelic world was created prior to the material world, there is good evidence that they were both closely connected in the purpose of God. Col.1:16 brings the creation of the angelic and material worlds together in Christ. And as we will later see, both worlds are involved in the unfolding drama of salvation that has yet to reach its climatic conclusion.

When Satan and some of the other angels fell into sin is equally unclear. Was it prior to the creation of the material world, or sometime between God's declaration that all was "very good" and the temptation and fall of man? That Satan and others did fall from their original perfection is clear from passages which relate what God did with those angels who sinned and did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home (Jude 6 cf. 2 Pe.2:4). Also the hymn of Col.1:15-20 which celebrates how everything in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether throne or powers or rulers or authorities, has been reconciled to God through the crosswork of Christ, presupposes a major rupture that necessitated reconciliation.

What caused Satan to rebel against the God who made him is a further mystery that God has not seen fit to definitely reveal. Some scholars believe passages like Is.14:12-14 provide a window through which to view Satan, and that a metaphorical hermeneutic must be employed when dealing with the oracles on the nations in Isaiah (cf. Ezk.28:11-19).³ Historically, these verses refer to the pride and arrogance of the king of Babylon. Do they go further and reflect the rebellious ambition of Satan and the launch of his dismal career? In Lk.10:18 Jesus sees Satan fall as lightning from heaven and in Rev.12:9 John pictures him being hurled down to the earth and his angels with him. Are these possible allusions to Is.14:12? While Satan may use earthly nations and kingdoms to persecute God and his people (Rev.13:1-10), how much they disclose Satan's biography remains obscure. More certain and suggestive is Paul's warning against being conceited and falling under the same condemnation as the devil (1 Tim.3:6). It would seem reasonable to conclude that pride played a primary role in his downfall. Did he think he was better than God? Was he jealous of human beings who were made in God's image and given authority over the earth? The details of his defection remained veiled. For now God has told us only as much as we need to know.

Satan is not just a fallen angel, he is the commander and chief (Eph.2:2) of all the angels who sinned and did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home (Jude 6). These fallen angels or demons are referred to in Eph.6:12 as "rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." It has become popular in recent years to dismiss such a supernatural interpretation. Designations like "rulers and authorities" are said to refer to human structures of authority like the political state with its bureaucracy and economic systems, or human opinions, accepted ideas of morality, even organized religion. Others opt for an environmental approach that sees these as elements of nature that resist God's rule such as wild animals, diseases, storms, bondage to decay and death.

While "rulers and authorities" are used in the biblical record to describe human governors and institutions (Lk.12:11; 20:20; Rom.13:1-3; Tit.3:1), in Ephesians it is the spirit world of cosmic intelligences that is in view. All three times these titles or something similar occur (Eph.1:20-22; 3:10; 6:12), Paul stresses that he is thinking of personages that exist in the "heavenly realms." In Eph.6:12 he specifically negates human beings when he says that the battle is not against "flesh and blood" (cf. Mt.16:17; 1 Co.15:50; Gal.1:16; Heb.2:14). In the immediate context of Eph.6:12 the devil is mentioned (v.11), and the armour to be used against such beings is spiritual not political or scientific in nature (vv.14-17). It is a mistake to restrict Satan's work to human structures such as the state. Governments can be evil but they can also be "God's servants to do us good" (Rom.13:1-3). If Satan and his fallen angels do not really exist as powerful spirit beings, how do we account for "temptations which look and feel like expressions of cunning destructive malice" that are a part of daily life.⁴ Even though the writers of the New Testament, unlike some of the Jewish apocalyptic writers,⁵ refuse to speculate and theorize about the demonic world, and while it is impossible to construct elaborate demonologies based on their information, passages like Eph.6:12 still give us

enough of a glimpse into this shadowy world to see that Satan and his hordes are personal beings, who are organized and possess real power.

Satan does not just possess power in the heavenly realms, he is also characterized as "the one who is in the world" (1 Jn.4:4), "the prince (or ruler) of this world" (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and "the god of this world" (2 Co.4:4). He is "a strong man" (Mt.12:29; Lk.11:21) who rules over this world demanding allegiance on the part of his subjects. So extensive is his influence that the whole world is said to be under his control (1 Jn.5:19). "Moreover (again literally) it 'lies' there. It is not pictured as struggling vigorously to be free but as quietly lying, perhaps even unconsciously asleep, in the embrace of Satan."⁶ And as if this is not bad enough, men and women who have not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit are said to be "of" the devil (Jn.8:44; 1 Jn.3:10), in the sense that he is their father and as his spiritual children they bear his likeness.

No treatment of Satan's person is complete without mentioning that he is the epitome of evil. He is worse than all the evil people who have ever lived on the earth. He is more proud, perverted, cruel, calloused, vile, bitter, violent, and miserable. Though he has the ability to masquerade as an angel of light (2 Co.11:14), his reign is one of moral, spiritual, and intellectual darkness (cf. Col.1:13; Acts 26:18). J.I. Packer reminds us that "the mentality of Satan is a mystery whose depths we can never fully plumb: not just because Satan is an angel, while we are men, but also because Satan is purely evil, and we cannot conceive what pure evil is like. No man is so far gone in sin that no vestige of goodness or truth remains in him; no man is wholly motivated by hatred of others; no man has literally no aim in life save to wreck and destroy the creative achievements of another; no man ever says to himself in literally every situation and every sphere of value, 'evil, be thou my good'; no man's character is integrated solely by the power of hate towards God."⁷

He has fallen from the lofty heights of angelic splendour to the depths of depravity. He slithers like a snake (Gn.3:1; Rev.20:2), breaths fire like a dragon (Rev.12:9; 20:2), and roars like a lion (1 Pe.5:8). He is called "the tempter" (Mt.4:4; 1 Th.3:5), "the enemy" (Mt.13:39), "the evil one" (Mt.13:19,38; 1 Jn.2:13; 3:12; 5:18), a murderer and the father of lies (Jn.8:44).

That he is an evil dignity to be taken seriously is vividly reinforced by Michael the archangel's refusal to bring a slanderous accusation against him, leaving his rebuke to the Lord (Jude 9).

Here is someone who does not play by the rules. A crafty master of execution who specializes and revels in death (Heb.2:14). He is not a bumbling fool who merely tries to trip us up, he is a relentless (Jb.1:7), frustrated (Rev.12:12) adversary who will go for the jugular if he gets half a chance.

Sin deceives (Heb.3:13), and Satan, who is a deceiver, is no exception to the rule. If he has an Achilles heel, this is it. He cannot bring himself to see that the writing is on the wall. Packer writes: "Satan has at one point at least lost his grip on reality. There is a

maggot in his brain we might say, which compels him to deny that he is a captive and beaten foe and to believe that if he fights hard enough against God and God's children he will overthrow them in the end. Like Hitler in his bunker, Satan cannot bring himself to believe that he has lost the war, and cannot now win... Evidently this knowledge takes the form of a furious denial and vigorous attempt to prove that it is not so... But the intense energy of denial proves that the knowledge is there."⁸

III. HIS ACTIVITIES

As the great adversary of God and man, he works to thwart God's purposes and keep men from the path of life. When the Word is preached he attempts to snatch it away before it can fall into the heart and take root (Mt.13:19). If people do hear it, he blinds or clouds their minds so that they do not understand it and cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Co.4:4). He knows how to mix truth and error in just the right proportions so as to seduce and he can misinterpret and misapply the Scriptures to suit his own ends (Gn.3:1-5; Mt.4:3ff.; 1 Tim.4:1). Where there is a spiritual vacuum he can fill it, dazzling those who find the truth dull by a spectacular display of miracles, signs and wonders (2 Th.2:9). If "the basic principles of the world" (NIV) or literally "the elements of the world" (ta stoicheia tou kosmou) in Colossians 2:8,20 (cf.Gal.4:3,9) are evil spiritual beings who are active in the heavenly and physical elements, which is the majority opinion of twentieth century commentators,⁹ then Satan can also take advantage of hollow and deceptive philosophies, human traditions and ascetic practices to keep people in bondage.

Wherever possible he will avoid a frontal attack preferring instead to infiltrate and work from within (Mt.13:24-30). He is a master of disguise (2 Co.11:14-15) and his agents often possess impeccable credentials. Cool and calculating he will wait for just the right moment to make his move, carefully grooming his dupes until they are ready to play the role he has devised only to discard them as expendable baggage when he is finished with them (Lk.22:3 cf. Mt.27:3-5).

He is not adverse to physically tormenting human beings and is able to inflict a variety of maladies including deafness and dumbness (Mk.9:25), blindness (Mt.12:22), convulsions (Mk.1:26; 9:20; Lk.9:39), and paralysis (Lk.13:16; Acts 8:7). There are also numerous examples of his ability to take control of a person's mind and personality through his demons though he is explicitly only said to enter into Judas prior to his betrayal of Jesus (Lk.22:3; cf. Jn.6:70 where definite article used in Greek ie. the devil). In Heb.2:14 he has the power of death and in Jn.8:44 he is called a murderer. These are not exaggerations. He murdered the whole human race back in the Garden of Eden and in Job 1:18-19 he used a mighty desert wind to kill the sons and daughters of that upright man who feared the Lord.

As much as he hates human beings in general, Christians are the particular objects of his attention. Not only do we bear the image of God by virtue of our humanity, that image is being renewed in true righteousness and holiness because of our relationship to

Jesus Christ. The more we resemble the God Satan hates, the more likely it is that we will come under his attack. As objects of God's special love we become the focus of the devil's special wrath. Furthermore, Satan, like any other proud homeowner or prince, does not take kindly to having his house robbed or his kingdom reduced in size and influence. He would love to persuade us to turn our backs on God and return to his service. If that is not possible he will not rest until he has made us useless or an outright disgrace.

To accomplish these objectives he will often inject thoughts or questions into the believer's mind, tempting him to turn from the path of obedience (Mt.4:3ff.; Acts 5:3). These can be proud thoughts, bitter thoughts, critical thoughts, impure thoughts, or discouraging thoughts. They can be questions about the reality of God, the power of the gospel, or even the existence of Satan himself. To make matter worse, after the thought or question is introduced he proceeds to blame us for it.

Sometimes he will tell us lies to keep us from doing what we know to be right. Lies like: "it is just a little sin," "no one will know," after all everyone is doing it," and "just this once." If we fall for his deception he will immediately change from tempter to accuser and try to crush us with guilt (Rev.12:10). He loves to make us fearful (1 Pe.5:8), and try to convince us that we cannot resist the power of sin (Rom.6:14).

Satan will use the world (external stimuli) and the flesh (inordinate desire within us) in an attempt to bring us down.¹⁰ For this reason we need to be very careful when it comes to what we watch and read and the activities we engage in. Those who do not discipline their eyes and hands and feet, and do not carefully structure their time will draw his fire.

If he gets a chance he will pervert and distort perfectly legitimate desires. Instead of leaving us alone to enjoy God's blessings with thankfulness within the bounds set by our loving and wise Creator, he will make the grass on the other side of the fence look so lush and appealing (Gn.3:6; Lk.4:3ff.; 1 Co.7:5).

He has even be known to take advantage of the sincere advice of a friend, as in the case of Peter advising Jesus about his mission (Mt.16:22), so we need discernment. Able to manipulate the circumstances of life, he stopped Paul again and again from visiting the brothers in Thessalonica (1 Th.2:17-18). And in 2 Co.12:7 the same apostle discloses that he was given a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment him. The exact nature of the thorn is unknown but we do know that it was serious enough for Paul to ask God it remove it on three occasions. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones believes that "demonic attacks" can leave a Christian severely depressed, feeling completely inadequate and even physically debilitated. Some of the most dramatic cases most commonly occur among "ministers, missionaries and evangelists, who have seemed to have been welcomed and successful in their work."¹¹

Satan has many different weapons in his arsenal. If he cannot get us to think impure thoughts, say hurtful words, or do wrong things, he will puff us up with pride, lull

us into a false sense of security, weary us until we let down our guard, or push us off balance. Many times throughout history he has vented his frustration by openly persecuting the church, often using corrupt government and ecclesiastical officials who think they are serving the public good to molest the saints (Rev.2:10; 13:1-17). Fear of persecution is not something to be taken lightly, in Satan's hands it can make the blood of the most determined saint run cold (Lk.22:31) unless God protects us.

IV. HIS LIMITATIONS

Satan is superhuman but not divine. As a creature made by God he is finite as opposed to infinite. Unlike God, he is not omniscient, omnipotent, nor omnipresent.

Because he is not omniscient he does not know the future. He can make an educated guess based on many long years of personal observation, but that is all (Is.41:21-24). Because he is not omnipotent he can only do what God permits. All his powers are derived and he knows it (Lk.4:6). Like a mean dog on a chain he cannot exceed the limits set by his divine master (Jb.1-2; 1 Co.10:13; Rev.2:10). Because he is not omnipresent he can only be in one place at a time, and although his vast network of demons may make it seem as though he is everywhere, he is not. However, I do believe J.M. Boice gets a little carried away when he concludes: "The interesting consequence of this fact is that Satan has probably never tempted you or anyone you know. Even in the Bible we find very few who were tempted by Satan directly."¹²

Believers may be intensely oppressed and afflicted by the devil but they can never be totally defeated (Jn.10:28; 17:15; Rom.8:38-39; 1 Jn.4:4; 5:18). In 1 Jn.5:18 (NIV) we are explicitly told it is Jesus Christ himself (the one born of God) who keeps the believer and Satan cannot harm him. All three verbs are in the present tense indicating that what is affirmed is an ongoing reality. In this case, the believer cannot continue in sin, the one born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.

According to Rev.20:1-3, Satan is unable to stop the penetration of the gospel into the world. Though this passage is full of controversy I believe the best interpretation takes the binding of Satan spoken of here to refer to what Christ did when he came to this earth. By his life and ministry, especially his death on the cross, he bound the strongman (Lk.11:21 cf. Mk.3:27; Mt.12:29). As a result Satan's long domination over the nations has been broken. This breakthrough was anticipated during his life and ministry before he went to the cross (Mt.2:1-12; 8:5-13; 15:21-28; Jn.12:20-32 cf. Mt.24:14; 28:18-20), and became such a wonderful reality after the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5; 8:5-25; 10; 11:19-21) that Paul could say to the Colossians: "This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven" (1:23). "Every time we see a new convert added to the church, Satan's inability to deceive the nations is proclaimed afresh."¹³

God can and does use Satan to purify his church. Satan wanted to destroy Peter and discredit his loyalty, but God overruled him to prepare Peter for greater service

(Lk.22:31-32; Jn.21:15-17). We do not know what Satan's messenger was thinking as he tormented the apostle Paul, but we know that God was using him to keep Paul humble and useful (2 Co.12:7). God is even able to channel Satan's power and desire to destroy (including his desire to inflict physical suffering or death) so that it becomes a means of saving a professed Christian brother who was gone astray (1 Co.5:5).

V. HIS DEFEAT AND FINAL OVERTHROW

Satan's defeat was predicted shortly after he slaughtered humanity (Gn.3:15). The ancient prophetic curse was fulfilled when Jesus Christ broke into human history. So closely was Christ's work bound to Satan's activity that John can say: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 Jn.3:8). Michael Green writes: "During those 30 odd years the key battle of the history of the universe was being conducted and both sides knew it."¹⁴

Jesus defeated him in the wilderness when he repelled his insidious temptations (Mt.4:1-11; Mk.1:13; Lk.4:1-13). This was not the only time Satan tried to compromise his devotion to his Father but no matter how hard he tried, and how much Jesus suffered, he could not succeed (Heb.2:18; 4:15).

Jesus defeated him when he cast out demons and healed the sick who had been securely held in his grip (Lk.11:17-23; 13:16). So great was Jesus' majesty that the demons immediately recognized him and did not want anything to do with him (Mk.1:24,34; 3:11; Lk.4:41). He even delegated his authority over the realm of darkness to his followers (Mk.3:14-19; 6:7; Mt.10:1; Lk.9:1; 10:1).

However, the great defeat of Satan and his fellow rebels took place at Calvary. It was at the cross that Jesus drove out and condemned the prince of this world and secured salvation for all believers (Jn.12:31; 16:11). On the cross Jesus disarmed or stripped the demonic powers and authorities of their power and authority by cancelling the written code, with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us (Col.1:14-15). Whether the "written code" is the Mosaic law, or a metaphorical way of speaking of our indebtedness to God (an IOU), or a combination of both, formerly the demonic world was able to terrorize us because of our sins. But this is no longer the case. Jesus has secured forgiveness through his blood shed on the cross. He "triumphed over them," a phrase which "alludes to what Roman generals did following a conquest when to announce their victory they paraded in triumph through the city, displaying the booty taken from conquered people and leading a host of bedraggled prisoners through the streets as a public spectacle."¹⁵

By means of Jesus' work on the cross cosmic peace has been established and God the Father has reconciled all things to himself, including the demonic world (Col.1:20). This does not mean that worldwide peace is presently experienced or that the demonic world has ceased to oppose God. But it does mean that their time is limited, their

sentence has been passed, their doom is sure, and one day soon they will not be found in the new heavens and earth.

In his death, Jesus also destroyed the devil who had the power of death and for years had used it as an instrument of intimidation (Heb.2:14). Death is something to fear especially when we realize that it is the penalty for our sins. And Satan who said we would not die if we listened to him has been terrorizing people with it ever since. It is the ultimate weapon of coercion. But Jesus has transformed the meaning of death for the Christian.¹⁶ Satan can no longer bully us around for we know that to be absent from the body is to be present with our Lord.

The victory of the cross was universally proclaimed by God the Father when he resurrected and exalted his Son to his right hand, the place of highest honour (Eph.1:20-23). Jesus is now Lord of all. He has triumphed over Satan. Now seated at the right of God in the heavenly realms he is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

That is the good news. But unfortunately it is not the only news. Though defeated the powers of darkness have not been completely overthrown. The victory is real but hidden. In the language of salvation history; already but not yet. Though Satan is bound with a chain that he will never be able to completely cast off, he is still a menace. Rev.12:12 seems to indicate that he is more furious than ever because he knows in his own perverse way that he does not have much time left. Proof of this is seen in the last petition of the prayer Jesus gave to his disciples (Mt.6:13), and in his own prayer as the great high priest of his people (Jn.17:15). It is seen in the way Jesus dealt with the demons who identified themselves as "Legion" (Mt.8:28-32). Since the time appointed for their torture had not yet come he granted them leave to continue on their evil course which they pursued immediately by entering the pigs and driving them into the sea.¹⁷ Commands and warnings in the NT epistles to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power, to put on the full armour of God (Eph.6:10-11), to be self-controlled and alert (1 Pe.5:8), and to resist the devil (Jas.4:7), bear this out as well.

One day Christ's victory over the powers of darkness will be universally proclaimed and realized in its fullness. That will be the day when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and his angels with him, and he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory (Mt.25:41). The Bible seems to teach that shortly before that day there will be an intensification of evil because just prior to the end, Satan will be temporarily granted more freedom (Rev.20:3). In one last desperate attempt to avoid the inevitable he will prosecute with deadly intensity his ancient war against God and his people. Standing with him and energized by him may well be the "man of lawlessness" spoken about in 2 Th.2:3-12. Consistent with everything we know about the god of this world, his human incarnation will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God, or is worshipped, even going so far as to set himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God (v.4). In a final pathetic display of his evil yearning to be worshipped as God, and of his hatred of men, Satan will enable the man of lawlessness to perform all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders (v.9). The foolish crowds will applaud and praise

this dynamic spiritual leader and in so doing stoke Satan's insatiable ego one last time. But at the appointed time the Lord Jesus will overthrow the man of lawlessness, destroying him by the splendour of his coming (2 Th.2:8). Intoxicated by Satan's leadership the deceived of this world will surround the camp of God's people, the city he loves (Rev.20:7-9). Fire will fall from heaven and devour them and the devil who led them astray will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur where he and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Mt.25:41; Rev.20:10).

No matter how the final events unfold we can be sure that Jesus will reign until he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. His victory on the cross insures that He will reign until all his enemies are under his feet and then he will hand the restored and perfected kingdom over to his Father, that God might be all in all (1 Co.15:24-28).

VI. HOW CAN WE STAND AGAINST HIM?

First, we must remember that Satan is a defeated foe. "He has been arrested, convicted and sentenced to imprisonment and is but for the time free on bail."¹⁸ Our Lord has thoroughly defeated and humiliated him and promises to crush him under our feet shortly (Rom.16:20). No matter what he tries to do to us we are more than conquerors through him who loved us and nothing he can throw at us can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom.8:37-39). Our heavenly Father, who knows us completely, has promised not to allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, and when tempted he will provide a way out so we can stand up under it (1 Co.10:13). The Holy Spirit who has come to live in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 Jn.4:4). As much as Satan hates us he cannot do us any ultimate harm because Jesus died for us, prays for us and promises to keep us by his grace (Col.1:12-14; Jn.17:15; 1 Jn.5:18).

Second, we must understand that as Christians we are involved in a supernatural struggle of cosmic proportions. Many Christians do not seem to realize this. They do not take Paul seriously when he writes, "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" (Eph.6:12). If we do not grasp the nature and dimensions of the conflict we will be caught off guard or we will look in the wrong places for help. Seclusion from the world, religious rituals, rigid man-made rules, or invoking the assistance of angels or saints will not help any more than reliance on human strength, human wisdom, or human theologies that demythologize or depersonalize or dismiss the powers of darkness.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins with spiritual blessings (ch.1-3), then goes on to spiritual responsibilities (ch.4-6:9), before finally coming to the matter of spiritual warfare (6:10-20). There is a link between the three. To be successful soldiers we must begin to grasp all that God has done for us in Christ and we must seek with the help of the Holy Spirit to fulfil our new responsibilities. However, the reverse is also true. To enjoy everything that God has treasured up for us in Christ and to fulfil our responsibilities we must face up to the fact that whether we like it or not, we are involved

in a difficult, dirty, and sometimes dangerous struggle with the prince of this world. As long as we are in this world we must be ready to struggle, or to be more precise, to wrestle hand-to-hand with the enemy of our souls. Often he is behind the spiritual coldness and deadness we feel. While we are making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace he is making every effort to destroy it. He does not want to see us become mature so that we are no longer infants tossed back and forth by the fads and theories of our times. He does not want us to be imitators of God and live radically different lives as children of light. He hates marriage and the family and does all he can to sabotage human relationships. Living as we do in the "overlap of the ages,"¹⁹ between Satan's defeat on the cross and his final overthrow at the end of the age, means that we find ourselves in the ring with a formidable foe.

Third, we must fight back. To sit back and wait for the Lord to do everything is as big a mistake as to go into the battle without him. When it comes to spiritual warfare fighting back involves vigorously resisting the devil by submitting to the Lord (Jas.4:7), and being self-controlled and alert (1 Pe.5:8; 1 Th.5:6). It means dealing immediately with anger, or any other sin, so that we do not give the devil a base of operations from which to attack our hearts and minds (Eph.4:26-27). It means being ready to forgive others so we are not outwitted by his schemes (2 Co.2:11).

In the classic passage on spiritual warfare Paul tells us that we must be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power (Eph.6:10). The words "strong", "mighty" and "power" were used earlier in 1:18-19 to refer to the power which brought Christ from the dead and us to faith in him. We avail ourselves of this incomparably great power when we put on the full armour of God (Eph.6:11-17). Only the armour forged and furnished by God will enable us to take our stand against the devil's schemes and continue to stand when the fighting is the heaviest. Every piece of armour is needed; no area must be left unprotected. Old Gurnall reminds us that, "A dart may fly in at a little hole, like that which brought a message of death to Ahab, through the joints of his harness, and Satan is such an archer, who can shoot at penny-breadth."²⁰

The full armour of God consists of the belt of truth (honesty, integrity and sincerity of heart), the breastplate of righteousness (uprightness of character, obedience to the will of God), the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace (stability supplied by knowing our sins are forgiven and we have peace with God), the shield of faith (reliance on God and his promises), the helmet of salvation (liberation from the penalty and power of sin), and the sword of the Spirit which is the written word of God.

The sword of the Spirit is the only weapon that can be used both offensively and defensively. The word of God and the Spirit of God are closely identified because the Spirit is the great author of the Scriptures. Because of its divine origin the Bible is the standard against which all ideas and practices both old and new must be measured. If any Christian is to stand against a wily foe like Satan he must be a diligent student of the Scriptures. But the word of God is also a powerful offensive weapon. When the word of truth or the gospel is preached in the strength of the Spirit captives are delivered from Satan's kingdom (Col.1:3-13; Acts 26:18).

Although prayer is not part of the armour of God the fact that Paul mentions it several times in Eph.6:18-20 should teach us that it is vitally important if we are to wage a successful campaign against Satan. The use of the participle "praying" in v.18 may imply that Paul expects us to put on each piece of armour with prayer and after we have done that to go on praying.²¹ Prayer is the supreme expression of our dependence on God. To restrain the demonic world we cannot play at prayer. We must pray in the Spirit no matter what our circumstances, and we must not give up. When we pray we must remember that we are not on the battlefield alone but are part of a redeemed army of warriors who have pledged allegiance to Jesus Christ. In this battle we need each other, we stand or fall together so it is crucial that we hold one another up before the throne of grace.

VII. DEMON POSSESSION

In the New Testament one of the most dramatic manifestations of Satan's power was the ability of his demons to take control of someone's personality. When this happened the person involved was said to "have a demon" (daimonion echo), or to "be demonized" (daimonizomai). Sometimes these spirits are called "unclean" (Acts 8:7) or "evil spirits" (Acts 19:12).²²

Demon possession can be associated with physical problems such as deafness, dumbness, blindness, convulsions and paralysis. This has led some to conclude that demon possession was a primitive, pre-scientific way of accounting for various diseases. However, this interpretation does not square with the facts. In the gospels the writers are careful to distinguish between exorcisms and healings (Lk.13:32; 4:40-41; 9:1), and they record many healings where there are no references to demonic involvement (Mt.8:5-13; 9:19-20; 27-30; 12:9-14; 14:35-36).

Other symptoms of demon possession include unusual physical strength (Mk.5:2-4), bizarre anti-social behaviour (Lk.8:27), self-destructive behaviour (Mt.17:15; Mk.5:5), and powers of extrasensory perception (Acts 16:16-18). No matter how they make their presence known, demons work in one way or another to destroy their host. There also seems to have been degrees of enslavement with more than one demon being able to invade a person. In Mt.12:45 Jesus speaks of eight demons coming to live in a man, and in Mk.5:9 a group of demons identify themselves as "Legion" because they were many (there were 6000 in a Roman legion), and in Lk.8:2 mention is made of Mary Magdalene who had been liberated from seven demons. Demons can speak by taking control of the voice of the person they inhabit (Mt.8:29,31; Mk.1:24,26,34; 5:7,9,10; Lk.4:41; 8:28,30). When they came into contact with Jesus they recognized him as the Son of God and often made it loud and clear that they did not want to have anything to do with him.

Jesus did not use any elaborate formulas or rituals when he cast out demons, his exorcisms were amazing acts of power (Mk.1:27). He gave his disciples authority to cast

out demons (Mt.10:1; Lk.10:17) but they were not always successful because of their lack of faith and prayer (Mt.17:19-20 cf. Mk.9:20). In the gospels we also encounter an apparently successful exorcist who was not part of the apostolic band (Mk.9:38; Lk.9:49), and later in Acts we learn that Philip and Paul could drive out demons as well (8:7; 16:18).

While there is good reason to believe that there was a tremendous increase in demonic activity associated with the coming of Jesus Christ (seeing that his specific purpose in coming was to destroy the devil's work 1 Jn.3:8), there is no reason to believe that demon possession was only a thing of the past and cannot occur today. Some dismiss demon possession outright because they do not believe in demons, others because they have an over-realized eschatology, and still others because it is outside the realm of their own personal experience. Many missionaries and Christian workers report cases in less developed countries and unfortunately, there are more and more cases being reported in the cities and towns of the modern industrialized world.

Caution does need to be exercised however. We need to carefully evaluate each case and make necessary distinctions between demonic possession and other forms of mental illness. Packer is right when he says: "In the gospels, demon-possession is known not just by disintegration of personhood, but also by recognition of Jesus' identity and authority as the Son of God, and hostility towards him. Only when this factor appears can demon-possession ever be diagnosed with confidence."²³

Contrary to Lloyd-Jones I do not believe that a Christian can be possessed in the sense of being so controlled by a demon that exorcism is necessary.²⁴ This is not to say that the Christian cannot come under intense attack but to go further seems to fly in the face of a passage like 1 Jn.5:18 among others.

Exorcism, per se, is useless and even dangerous both for the exorcist and for the person being exorcized unless there is a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and possession by the Holy Spirit (Mt.7:22-23; Acts 19:13-16; Mt.12:43-45). In all cases the truth of the gospel must be brought to bear on the persons involved. If we are ever required to minister to a person who seems to be demon possessed we must emphasize the complete victory of Jesus Christ over Satan on the cross, we must confront that person with the truth of the Scriptures, and we must not shrink back in fear. We will win the war against Satan if we take to heart the message of the loud voice the apostle John heard in heaven: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short" (Rev.12:10-12).

FOOTNOTES

1. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology, Vol 1* (Grand Rapids 1983) 446-447.
2. John R.W. Stott, *The Letters of John* (Grand Rapids 1988) 141.
3. Timothy M. Warner, *Spiritual Warfare* (Wheaton 1991) 15.
4. J.I. Packer, *God's Words* (Downers Grove 1981) 83.
5. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids 1974) 51.
6. Stott, *Letters of John* 195-196.
7. Packer, *Words* 87-88.
8. *Ibid.* 88.
9. P.T. O'Brien, *Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church in Biblical Interpretation and the Church: The Problem of Contextualization* ed., D.A. Carson (Nashville 1984) 135-136.
10. Packer, *Words* 91.
11. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Healing and The Scriptures* (Nashville 1987) 162.
12. J.M. Boice, *The Sovereign God* (Downers Grove 1978) 227.
13. Michael Wilcock, *I Saw Heaven Opened* (Downers Grove 1975) 189.
14. Michael Green, quoted by O'Brien in *Powers* 138.
15. N.T. Wright, *Colossian and Philemon* (Grand Rapids 1986) 114.
16. F.F. Bruce, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids 1964) 51.
17. Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of The Kingdom* (Philadelphia 1962) 112.
18. C. Samuel Storms, *Healing and Holiness* (Phillipsburg 1990) 141.
19. O'Brien, *Powers* 144.
20. Quoted by G.B. Wilson, *Ephesians* (Edinburgh 1978) 129.
21. Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids 1989) 184-185.

22. Erickson, Theology 449.
23. Packer, Words 84.
24. Lloyd-Jones, Healing 166.

BOOK LIST

Frederick S. Leahy, Satan Cast Out.

Timothy M. Warner, Spiritual Warfare.

Timothy N. Gross, Miracles, Demons, And Spiritual Warfare.

C. Samuel Storms, Healing and Holiness.

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