

The Heart of the Matter

Lesson 6: The Christian's Attitude Toward Satan

1. Why This Subject for this Study?

On first glance this lesson may appear to be superfluous because the issue seems so obvious. Except for the deranged Satanist (of which there are not a few), most everyone would automatically say that Satan must be regarded as abhorrent and should be resisted.

But if the issue is so clear, why do so many succumb to his influence? Perhaps the Great Adversary is more powerful and elusive than we generally think.

2. The Adversary of Man

The Biblical terminology and description of Satan should naturally evoke revulsion from every thinking person. Vine notes that "Satan is not simply the personification of evil influences in the heart, for he tempted Christ, in whose heart no evil thought could ever have arisen" (Vol. 3, p. 320). Rather, Satan is a personal being, of uncertain origin, intent upon the destruction of man.

Satan: This is a transliteration of the Gk. *satanas* which means "adversary." It was Satan who tempted Jesus (Mt 4:10); it was Satan who entered Judas to provoke betrayal (Luke 22:3); it was Satan who asked to sift Peter like wheat (Luke 22:31); it was Satan who influenced Ananias and Sapphira to lie (Acts 5:3). It is clear from such references that Satan's purpose is to lead men astray from God.

The Devil: The meaning of *diabolos* is "an accuser, a slanderer" (Vine, Vol. 1, p. 306). Vine further notes: "From it the English word "Devil" is derived, and should be applied only to Satan, as a proper name. *Daimon*, a demon, is frequently, but wrongly, translated "devil;" it should always be translated "demon" ... There is one Devil, there are many demons. Being the malignant enemy of God and man, he accuses man to God" (ibid).

John said "*the devil has sinned from the beginning*" (1 John 3:8). Jesus concurs: "*He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him*"

(John 8:44). Those who sin have been "*taken captive by him to do his will*" (2 Tim. 2:26).

We should picture the devil, not in a red suit with horns, cloven hooves and a pointed tail, but a horribly evil

being who is intent upon our destruction. What he *looks like* is of no consequence; we must be acquainted with his activities, his methods and his motives.

3. A Being of Great Power

Satan is also identified as "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). Paul describes our struggle against him and his minions: "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*" (Eph. 6:12)

Some have supposed that demons fill the literal air around us ... It seems rather, that Paul is speaking of the existing moral atmosphere rather than the literal air that we breathe. He is metaphorically saying that the Devil and his subordinates have caused human society to be so filled with their evil that to live among men is to breathe their evil. The prevailing mood or moral affinity of man is sinful and we are all surrounded by it.

[C.G. Caldwell, *Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 71]

Satan has *never failed* in his attempts to incite rebellion and disobedience against God. Every person (of responsible mental capacity) who has ever lived has been swayed by him. In fact, so total and complete is his influence in the world that the New Testament speaks of him as its “ruler” (cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

But just how powerful is Satan? It is obvious that he is intelligent, but is he omniscient? While he seems to know us and our weaknesses, he apparently did not realize that his destruction of Jesus would provide redemption for sin. Thus he brought ultimate defeat to himself in his all-out effort to destroy the Son of God (cf. Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8).

How pervasive is Satan? Is he omnipresent like God – everywhere all at once? When Jesus resisted him, “*the devil left Him*” (Matt. 4:11). Evidently, he was not where Jesus was; thus he is not omnipresent. Further, we are told that if we resist him he will flee from us (Jas. 4:7).

While it appears that there are certain things that Satan cannot know and do, he remains very potent and dangerous. Paul even accuses him of hindering his travels (1 Thess. 2:18).

4. The Devil Is Not a Joke

Satan is not to be trifled with; he deserves more credit than to be made the butt of a joke. He is a formidable, homicidal enemy deserving of the greatest respect. We should study him and our own weaknesses and anticipate where he will attack. So many parallels can be drawn between Satan and the terrorist attacks that occurred in our nation last year. We took terrorism for granted; we underestimated how far hatred was willing to go in harming us; we let our guard down. And we paid for it. So it is with Satan. He deserves our utmost caution and attention (1 Pet. 5:8). We will discuss his “wiles” in the next lesson.

Questions for Discussion

1. What did Satan suggest about Job’s faithfulness to God (Job 1:11; 2:5)?
2. How did Satan represent the commandments of God to Eve (Gen. 3:4-5)? How does Paul characterize his action in 2 Cor. 11:3?
3. In what sense do you think Satan “entered” Judas (Luke 22:3)?
4. What is the significance of everlasting fire in Matt. 25:41?
5. Cite a passage which indicates that Satan uses human agents to do his bidding.