

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS SATAN DOING?

Are we fooling ourselves if we blame our problems on the devil? Or are we being spiritually naive if we don't? Does our Christian faith require us to believe in a real, unseen enemy whose aggressive strategy is to keep us from loving and trusting Christ?

Dan Vander Lugt, RBC biblical counselor, has written this booklet to correct some current misconceptions about Satan. It is our prayer that it will help you to be both forewarned and forearmed against an evil empire organized not only to rule the world but to take the place of Christ in your heart.

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IS SATAN A MYTH OR A REALITY?

A recent survey revealed that nearly 70 percent of the American public believes that Satan is real. But this statistic doesn't reflect the lack of understanding people have about his nature or activities. Many in our society have strong, confused, and conflicting ideas about Satan.

A few years ago psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, who authored the remarkable bestseller *The People of the Lie*, admitted, "In common with 99 percent of psychiatrists and the majority of the clergy, I did not think the devil existed." But this perception may be changing. Many scientifically minded people are no longer so sure. Some, like Peck, have been led toward the Christian faith through their grappling with the reality of evil. Others, though speaking freely of the devil, do so in a non-Christian context.

Ludwig Staudenmaier was a German scientist who accepted the Freudian idea that the devil was only a "myth," a "personification of repressed, unconscious drives." After completing his doctoral work in chemistry, zoology, and theology, he became obsessed with a desire to "explore the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural, to allow the natural sciences to determine as accurately as possible the distinction between pathology and actual satanic manifestations."

At the suggestion of a friend, Staudenmaier began experimenting with the psychic technique known as "automatic writing," a phenomenon in which the subject learns how to place himself into a trance, permitting unseen forces to write messages through his hand. He soon became quite adept at automatic writing even though he considered what he wrote to be the product of his subconscious mind.

Soon, however, he was disturbed by hallucinations, which rapidly increased in both their frequency and severity. One night as he lay in his bed, he had the distinct feeling of a chain being fastened around his neck and tightened. Then came the strong odor of sulphur and a sinister voice saying, "You are now my captive. I will never free you. I am the devil." Although still clinging to his scientific perspective, Staudenmaier began to have second thoughts about his venture. He wrote:

There remains in my mind no doubt that according to a naive, medieval perspective I have become possessed. Therefore, only two alternatives remain: Either I am on the brink of understanding the puzzle of human existence from a new and entirely novel perspective, or I am a fool who has thrown away years of time, health, and perhaps even life itself.

He continued to be tormented by hallucinations until he died some years later in Rome. Staudenmaier's experience is not unique. People of every culture have sensed or encountered the reality of a personal, supernatural, evil, spirit being. Some of the greatest writers of recent centuries are people who took the devil very seriously. Feodor Dostoevski, Charles Baudelaire, Thomas Mann, Flannery O'Connor, and Georges Bernanos are just a few examples.

Satan also appears in areas untouched by Western civilization with its Judeo-Christian heritage. Possibly the most striking satanic figures ever created are the viciously leering "fire gods" crafted 1,000 years before Columbus by post-Olmec Indians.

Jeffrey Burton Russell states: "Parallel formulations of the devil in diverse and widely separated cultures . . . are striking" (*The Devil*, Cornell University Press, p.55).

In analyzing such evidence two mistakes are made. Some find ways to explain them as psychological phenomena with their origin in the human psyche. This interpretation usually leaves some aspects of these experiences unexplained. Others err in the opposite direction. They see demons everywhere and give simplistic solutions to complex situations. They offer their exorcism formulas as panaceas for almost all ills.

It is important that we avoid both extremes--rationalization and gullibility.

HOW DO WE KNOW SATAN IS REAL?

Science will never find Satan. Its instruments will never be able to measure or prove the reality of spiritual things. The demonic is known by other means.

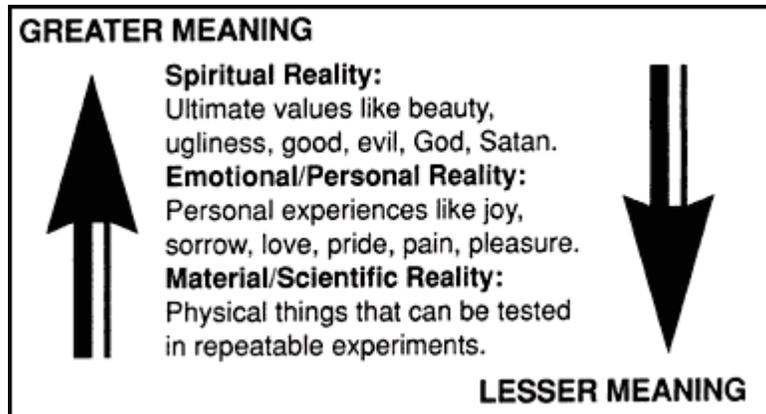
M. Scott Peck, a recent convert to belief in the devil's reality, tells how he became aware of the spiritual dimension of life, not through scientific inquiry but through grappling with the reality of evil in the lives of his patients. He writes:

I don't hope to convince the reader of Satan's reality. Conversion to a belief in God generally requires some kind of actual encounter--a personal experience--with the living God. Conversion to a belief in Satan is no different (*The People of the Lie*, Simon and Schuster, p.184).

Many people who insist that they believe only what can be scientifically verified have never taken the time to consider how inconsistent their viewpoint is. The most important things in our lives, after all, are not things that can be proved or disproved scientifically. Science cannot prove that love for family and friends is real. Neither can science assure us of the validity of our

emotions in response to beautiful music or a walk through a place of great natural beauty. Beyond this, science cannot provide us with any ultimate standard for values or morality.

There are obviously many real things that cannot be verified, quantified, evaluated, proved, or disproved by science. Reality has dimensions (or "levels") that transcend science and must be understood in different ways. A simple way to understand these "levels" of reality is to think in terms of the following model:



As can be seen from this model, things that mean the most cannot be investigated by science at all! Therefore, the Christian need not be embarrassed by the fact that he appeals to the wisdom of the Bible rather than science as the ultimate basis for what he believes about Satan.

The Bible is so full of references to the devil that it is impossible to hold to the Christian faith without accepting the reality of Satan. His existence is taught in seven Old Testament books: Genesis, 1 Chronicles, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. And it is affirmed by every New Testament writer. Jesus clearly believed in the personal existence of the devil (Matt. 4:1-11; 13:39; Lk. 10:18; 11:18). In fact, in 25 of the 29 passages that refer to Satan in the gospels, Christ is speaking. If such a basic biblical teaching as this were dismissed as outdated superstition, we would have grounds for questioning the Bible's authority in everything it says.

TWO CONTEMPORARY "DEVILS"

To help us have a clearer understanding of the devil, let's look at two modern trends.

The New Age Nature God. While many insist that the devil is merely a "mythological figure" or a "personified symbol of sin," followers of the New Age movement are returning to ancient paganism for their concept of Satan. One of the influential groups in this movement, the Findhorn Garden Community, provides a striking example of the radical changes that are occurring in the thinking of a large number of well-educated people. They report supernatural experiences, write about the reappearance of old gods, and scorn "modern" ideas about reality.

The Findhorn Community was established in 1966 largely on the experiences of R. Ogilvie Crombie. He reported in detail a face-to-face encounter with a being who introduced himself as the devil. The founder of the Findhorn Community declared that Crombie's encounter "proved to be a turning point in his life--and ours as well" (*The Findhorn Garden*, Harper and Row, p.17).

Crombie said that the devil has cloven hooves, shaggy legs, and horns on his forehead, but insisted that he is not an evil being. He declared that the devil is actually Pan, the nature god, and that he has been completely misunderstood by the Christian tradition.

Many people, secular humanists and orthodox Christians alike, write off such reports as hallucinations. But thousands of well-educated people are taking them seriously. New Age people are often transformed through their religious experiences. So many are turning to neo-paganism that some think it could prove to be the religion of Antichrist.

The Heavy Metal Devil. The second contemporary devil is the product of a sick culture, coming to the fore whenever a society abandons itself to wickedness. During the period of decadence in France prior to the French Revolution, the Marquis de Sade became infamous for his satanic writings. The marquis proposed a philosophy of radical selfishness that theoretically approved of murder, the torture of children, and cannibalism.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a man named E. A. Crowley achieved notoriety as the result of his depraved personal behavior. He called himself "the Great Beast--666," bit women in the neck when introduced to them, defecated on living room carpets, and practiced flamboyant black magic and satanic worship.

Present-day culture is unique in its elevation of such figures to the position of popular heroes. The degenerate pop idols of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s offer no message except self-indulgence and rebellion. They are parasites who prey upon the social order that nurtures them--hypocrites who sign multimillion dollar record contracts with an establishment they profess to despise. Using a great deal of satanic imagery, these "artists" advocate and model such destructive behavior as drug abuse, promiscuous sex, and violence. Claiming no responsibility for the image they project, they have inspired younger and weaker minds to molestation, mutilation, murder, and suicide.

WHO IS SATAN?

Although the pictures of the devil in widely separated civilizations are remarkably uniform, they don't tell us very much about his identity, origin, or activities. To gain specific information concerning his character, we must look to the Bible. Even here, we don't find answers to every question that comes to mind. Still, the Scriptures reveal all we need to know to take him seriously and to frustrate his efforts to destroy us.

His Origin. Satan has not always existed. He and all the other angels were created (Ps. 148:2,5; Col. 1:16). In Ezekiel 28:12-15 we find a description of Satan before he sinned. Although the prophet was speaking to the king of Tyre, there are certain indications in the passage that he was speaking beyond the king to Satan himself. Created by God as "the anointed cherub who covers" (v.14), he was "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (v.12) and covered with "every precious stone" (v.13). He was in "Eden, the garden of God" (v.13) and placed "on the holy mountain of God" (v.14). Satan most likely had a special place of prominence in his service to God.

His Sin. Referring to Satan, Ezekiel 28:15 states, "You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you." Ezekiel then added, "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor" (v.17).

Satan's sin originated in pride, grew into self-deception, and ended in rebellion. In Isaiah 14:13,14 we read, "For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation . . . ; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High' " (Is. 14:13,14). Satan's pride so deluded him that he claimed equality with God. This led him to spark a rebellion in which he induced a large number of angels to join him (Rev. 12:4).

His Punishment. After Satan sinned, God threw him out of heaven to the earth (Is. 14:12; Ezek. 28:16,17). His final punishment will come shortly after the end of the millennial reign of Christ on the earth. At that time, Satan will be "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10).

His Personhood. Satan is not an impersonal evil force. He possesses the traits of personality: intellect (2 Cor. 11:3), emotion (Rev. 12:17), and will (2 Tim. 2:26). Furthermore, personal pronouns are used of him in both the Old and New Testament (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Zech. 3:1,2; Matt. 4:1-12).

His Names. We can learn a great deal about who Satan is by looking at the different names, titles, and representations of him throughout Scripture:

- *Satan* (Zech 3:1; Matt. 4:10; Rev. 12:9; 20:2), used 52 times, comes from the Hebrew word *satan* meaning "adversary" or "opposer."
- *Devil* (Matt. 4:1; 13:39; Eph. 4:27; Rev. 12:9; 20:2), used 35 times, comes from the Greek word *diabolos* meaning "slanderer, accuser."
- *Lucifer* (Is. 14:12) means "son of the morning," "shining one," or "light bearer." Even though this describes him before his fall, Satan currently "transforms himself into an angel of light" to deceive the world (2 Cor. 11:14).
- *Anointed cherub* (Ezek. 28:14) indicates that he had one of the highest (if not the highest) ranking of all the angels.
- *Evil one* (Matt. 13:19,38; John 17:15; Eph. 6:16; 1 John 5:18,19) describes him as the personification of evil.
- *Ruler of this world* (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) refers to his power over the evil world-system of men and demons.
- *God of this age* (2 Cor. 4:4) is used in reference to his power to blind the minds of the world to the gospel.
- *Prince of the power of the air* (Eph. 2:2) describes his pervasive spiritual influence.

- *Serpent* (Gen. 3:1; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9; 20:2) portrays his deceit and craftiness.
- *Dragon* (Rev. 12:3,7,9) indicates his fierce nature and power to destroy.
- *Accuser* (Rev. 12:10).
- *Tempter* (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess 3:5).
- *Deceiver* (Rev. 12:9; 20:3).
- *Murderer* (John 8:44).
- *Liar* (John 8:44).
- *Sinner* (1 John 3:8).
- *Beelzebub, ruler of the demons* (Matt 10:25; 12:24,27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15), literally translated means "lord of the flies."
- *Belial* (2 Cor. 6:15) means "worthless" or "wicked."
- *Roaring lion* (1 Pet. 5:8) describes him as hungry and on the prowl to devour Christians.

WHAT IS SATAN DOING? Satan Is Fighting Us

A life of faith in Jesus Christ is a life of conflict. Jesus referred to the devil as our enemy (Matt. 13:39; Luke 10:19), and he is also called our adversary (1 Pet. 5:8). As such, he hates God's people and tries to destroy them. He does this with a strategy of infiltration, neutralization, and destruction.

Planting counterfeits. Jesus warned us that our enemy, the devil, plants false Christians among the true (Matt. 13:24-30). Some of these "false brethren" (2 Cor. 11:26) directly attack true believers. Others try to introduce a false, ritualistic gospel within the organized church (Gal. 1:6-9). Still others, either from within the church or through a cult, teach a counterfeit righteousness (Rom. 10:1-3). Jesus called these tares "the sons of the wicked one," declaring that the one who sows them is "the devil" (Matt. 13:38,39).

Though proper church discipline can remove some impostors and false teachers from the local congregation, we can't always tell the false from the true. It is impossible, therefore, to cleanse the church completely of its enemy agents. Nevertheless, we need to be on guard at all times, measuring all things by the Word of God, testing not only the words of fellow believers but also their behavior and attitudes. If you find a spirit of pride and willfulness, be careful. Apply the Word of God with humility and gentleness (Matt. 18:15-17; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; 2 Pet. 2; 1 John 4:1-6).

Devouring Victims. Satan is an inhuman, merciless fiend whose ultimate goal is the destruction of the human race. He should never be taken lightly. Peter, who learned by personal experience what it meant to be shaken in the grip of Satan (Luke 22:31-34,54-62), later referred

to the devil as our enemy who prowls around like a lion looking for someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

Some Bible interpreters have taken the word *devour* quite literally. They point out that Peter was writing to Christians under persecution who might be tempted to deny their faith. Interestingly, a letter has been found in which an early Christian described fellow believers who at first denied their faith but later repented and stood firm as having been "devoured" by Satan and "disgorged alive."

C. S. Lewis depicts Satan and evil spirits as motivated by "a kind of hunger." He also points out that very self-centered people often try to gain total control over their companions. He compares their desire to "absorb" the personalities of other people to Satan:

It is for this that Satan desires all his own followers and all the sons of Eve and all the hosts of heaven. His dream is of the day when all shall be inside him and all that says "I" can say it only through him (*The Screwtape Letters*, Macmillan Publishing Company, Preface, p.xi).

Of course, Satan hasn't been granted the power to devour the children of God. But he can influence us to the point of making us serve his ends.

Satan, therefore, is our enemy--clever, cruel, hungry, always on the prowl. As the enemy of the church, he plants counterfeit Christians alongside the genuine. We must be on guard against these tactics. And we must counterattack by bearing fruit for God wherever we have been planted. As the devouring enemy, he will draw us into himself and make us his instruments unless we maintain a serious attitude toward life and keep on the alert.

WHAT IS SATAN DOING? Satan Is Ruling

The devil heads a great kingdom of evil. The New Testament refers to him as "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4), "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), and the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31). Jesus identifies Satan with Beelzebub, prince of the demons (Luke 11:14-23). In addition, his human followers are "the sons of the wicked one" (Matt. 13:38), "ministers" of Satan (2 Cor. 11:15), the "synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9), and the "children of the devil" (1 John 3:10). He exercised authority over the rulers of Persia through a demon called "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" (Dan. 10:12,13). Jude portrays him as so awesome in his power and authority that the archangel "dared not bring against him a reviling accusation" (v.9). In Ephesians 6:12 he is pictured as heading a well-organized army of spiritual agents.

The devil, however, is not everywhere-present, all-powerful, or all-knowing, like God. He is subject to the limitations of creaturehood. To carry out his program he must work through subordinates--both demonic and human.

He has organized his demons into a military structure. As noted earlier, a demon was assigned to influence the leaders of Persia (Dan. 10:12,13). The terms *principalities*, *powers*, *rulers of*

this darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness (Eph. 6:12) denote the ranks in his army. Through them he gathers information and implements his will. Just as a competent general can impose a high degree of control over his army and through his troops carry out his program over a vast area, the devil can rule his worldwide kingdom of darkness.

The devil also uses people. Although he can be in only one place at one time and cannot personally work in every human heart, he influences multitudes both through his demonic followers and through a system of thought the Bible calls "the world." John wrote:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world (1 John 2:15-17).

The "world" in this context is a way of thinking that dominates the life of runaway humanity. The characteristics of this thought-system may vary from one culture to another, but these differences are relatively insignificant. What is consistent, however, is an emphasis on the temporal rather than the eternal. He influences multitudes as they buy into the thinking of their day.

He also uses mankind's sinful nature. Paul declared that before we came to Christ we "were dead in trespasses and sins, . . . walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, . . . conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh" (Eph. 2:1-3). When people willfully choose evil, they become the "children of the devil" (John 8:44; Acts 13:10; 1 John 3:10). Thus multitudes of people either knowingly or unknowingly help Satan in his role as "the god of this world."

The devil's power over mankind, though limited by God's permissive and directive will, is fearful. He and his evil spirits can assume visible form (Matt. 4, Luke 4); cause blindness (Matt. 12:22), paralysis (Acts 8:7), and convulsions (Luke 9:39); induce self-destructive or bizarre behavior (Luke 8:27; Matt. 17:15); compel animals to destroy themselves (Matt. 8:28-34); create powerful illusions (Ex. 7:11,12); and perform signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24).

Evil spirits have the power to directly influence our health, moods, imagination, and thoughts. For example, it is sobering to read that "Satan entered Judas" (Luke 22:3) and led him to betray Christ and finally commit suicide. And it is frightening to read about the horrible condition of the two demon-possessed men in Matthew 8:28,29.

We must not make the mistake of minimizing Satan's power or denying the reality of his kingdom of evil. But we must also avoid the error of giving in to despair. He cannot go beyond the limits set by God. Moreover, the Christian who submits to God and resists the devil can put him to flight (James 4:7).

WHAT IS SATAN DOING? Satan Is Deceiving

The Lord Jesus placed heavy emphasis on the deceitful nature of the devil. In a confrontation with the Pharisees, He declared that their inability to recognize the truth was due to the fact that they were allied with the devil.

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44, NIV).

Dr. William Hendriksen made this comment:

The devil, then, is the very wellspring of lies, the creator of falsehoods When he lies, he is the original. When he does not lie (Acts 16:16,17), he quotes or even plagiarizes; but even then he gives the borrowed words a false setting in order to create an illusion. He ever strives to lie and to deceive, and this he does in order to murder (*The Gospel of John*, Baker, p.61).

It is the devil's very nature to lie because he began his career in an act of self-delusion. "You have said in your heart: . . . I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the Most High" (Is. 14:13,14).

By deluding himself into believing that he could claim a position of equality with the Most High, Satan fell from his position of high honor. He became the "father of lies," depending on a web of self-deceit and illusion to maintain his fantasy of equality with God.

By claiming equality with God, the devil is forced to lie to himself about every aspect of reality. His rebellion has locked him into an irrational posture in which he desperately denies the evidence of his own hopelessness and meaninglessness.

The devil's position is the same as that of an extremely self-centered person who clings to an unrealistic view of himself. For example, a self-centered person who thinks he is a great singer will not accept any criticism that implies the contrary. Rather than admitting the possibility that he might be wrong in his estimate of himself, he will associate only with people who encourage him in his self-delusion. He may continue to believe that he is a wonderful singer even if he can find no one else who agrees.

The psychological term for such irrational willfulness is *narcissism*, and we are all aware of people who to a greater or lesser degree exhibit this tendency. Such people eventually accept reality (however painful it may be) or they defy it by either withdrawing into their own inner world or attempting to reconstruct reality so that it fits their false ideas. (Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin are two individuals who took the second approach.) The devil is the ultimate narcissist. He is powerful and willful enough to attempt to restructure all of God's created reality in order to keep his false sense of self-importance.

Satan does not deceive others in the manner of one who knows the truth and merely seeks to mislead. Satan lies because his own intelligence has been darkened by his perverted will. He is the "father of lies" because he has deluded himself and willfully persists in his self-delusion.

Let's take a look at how the self-deceived one has been aggressively deceiving mankind from the very beginning of human history.

The Elements of Satan's Lie. The basic elements of Satan's lie are recorded in Genesis 3:1-8. His words seem to have been chosen carefully to cause Eve to question God's trustworthiness: "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the Garden'?" He wanted Eve to perceive God from his own diabolic perspective, questioning God's motives and intentions. He wanted her to fear that God's plans for her would violate her individuality and run contrary to her deepest needs and desires.

The devil next denied the truth of God's warning. He said, "You will not surely die." Having planted doubt in Eve's mind concerning God's goodness, he wanted her to believe that no consequences would result from her disobedience.

He continued: "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (v.5). These words were a direct attack on God's goodness and an appeal to Eve's pride. Satan portrayed the Lord as denying Adam and Eve the one thing that would bring them ultimate fulfillment--equality with God. These perverse words came straight from the devil's heart, reflecting his own view of God.

When Adam and Eve acted in accordance with the lie, they became the helpless pawns of Satan's rebellion. His lie remains unchanged today.

The Results of Believing Satan's Lie. The story of the fall shows us that when people believe Satan's lie that God cannot be fully trusted, they fall into the fear of self-exposure. After Adam and Eve had eaten from the forbidden tree, they became conscious of their nakedness, made a feeble attempt to cover their shame with fig leaves, and tried to hide from God (Gen. 3:7-10).

Christian psychologist Larry Crabb says that the primary motivation for all of our social behavior is a fear that if others really knew us as we are, they would reject us in disgust. This fear of exposure is rooted in our sense of the ugliness of our fallen natures as they have been perverted and corrupted by sin. Satan delights in inflaming this fear until we, like the Pharisees, transform ourselves into "whitewashed tombs" (Matt 23:27) of self-deceit and self-righteousness.

M. Scott Peck has observed that the central defect of evil people lies not in the fact that they sin but in the fact "that they refuse to acknowledge [their sin]" (*People of the Lie*, p.69). He also points out that evil people are the people of the lie, "deceiving others as they also build layer upon layer of self-deception" (p.66).

This fear of self-exposure drives people into relativism, mysticism, and legalism. Often they find themselves confronted with intense experiences and "counterfeit gods" so compelling that they become convinced that they are on the right track. When this happens, they fall helplessly into the clutches of that self-deluded serpent who is masquerading as the source of truth.

Satan's Disguise. Paul warns us that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). This is necessarily so, since anyone would flee from him if they sensed his true nature. A master of disguise, Satan appears in many forms to conceal the truth of the incarnation.

The New Age movement gives us many examples of how this happens. While it denies the reality of a separate creator and claims a form of deity for man, this current cosmic charade is replete with accounts of encounters with "guides," "spirits," "entities," and figures from pagan mythology. Carlos Castenada's books on Yacqui Sorcery contain hair-raising accounts of his meetings with demonic figures. Shirley MacLaine's popularization of the practices of "channeling" and "astral projection" is just a resurfacing of occultic practices that have long been widespread. Carl Jung, the brilliant founder of the Jungian School of Psychology, was noted for his occult interests. While he vehemently denied the truth of the incarnation, he embraced the theory of reincarnation on the authority of figures who spoke to him in his visions and dreams.

Satan's kingdom works through sinister figures like the Nazi leaders (all of whom were deeply involved with occultism). But he also deceives people through innocent-appearing means. Reports that the wife of an American president relied on astrology for advice on important decisions are deeply disturbing. The kingdom of darkness also tempts us with many things that are not evil in themselves. Wealth, property, fame, power, family, friends, science, art, and even religion can become false gods if they distract us from an understanding of our loving Creator as He has revealed Himself in Christ.

WHAT IS SATAN DOING? Satan Is Accusing Us

In Revelation 12:10 the devil is portrayed as the "accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night." The Greek word for *devil* (*diabolos*) means "slanderer, false accuser." The classic statement on the role of Satan as the great accuser is found in the book of Job (1:6-12; 2:1-5). And in the vision recorded in Zechariah 3:1-10, Satan is standing at the right hand of Joshua to make accusation against him. God apparently allowed him this privilege so that His grace to sinners might be magnified.

Because he hates those who don't believe his lie, Satan is an accuser of Christ and all who follow Him. Because he denies the goodness of God's creation, we can expect him to place the worst possible interpretation on any act of faith and obedience. Since Satan's accusing spirit is duplicated in the fleshly nature of every person, obedient Christians are exposed to constant accusation from within and without (Rom. 7:13-25).

The devil shares his character with all who join him in doubting the goodness of God. People who resist the truth and thus become "the children of the devil" become so warped and twisted in mind that even the best actions of God's people are often perceived as being rooted in evil.

We see this trait of fallen man illustrated in the Pharisees' attitude toward Jesus Christ. They called the sinless Son of God a drunkard, a glutton, a friend of immoral people, a violator of the law, a sorcerer, an insurrectionist, and a blasphemer.

Anyone who has felt the force of the accuser's power realizes how helpless we are to resist his temptations and accusations in our own strength. Each of us is so compromised by sin and impure motives that we can be confused, paralyzed, and even driven to despair when we are exposed to the merciless attack of either the fleshly nature within or demonic accusations without. If it were not for the saving and interceding role of Christ, we would quickly succumb to the charges of our accusing enemy.

Peter learned this lesson the hard way. When self-confidence prompted him to declare his willingness to live and die for Christ, the Lord warned him:

Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren (Luke 22:31,32).

Knowing that Peter had opened the door for the devil by his self-confidence, Jesus told him what the devil would be doing and promised to intercede for him. The devil's accusations would sift Peter like wheat, confusing him, demoralizing him, and separating him from his faith as wheat is separated from chaff.

Peter did lose his courage, and he denied his Lord three times. But because of Christ's intercession, his faith did not fail. Here is a solemn warning against self-confidence! Our sins and failings make us vulnerable to Satan's accusations. We must stand before God therefore on the basis of Christ's righteousness (Phil. 3:1-9; Titus 3:5), not our own. We need the intercession of Him who had no shade of falseness or improper motive. He, and He alone, could say, "The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (John 14:30).

WHAT IS SATAN DOING? Satan Is Possessing

Possession by either Satan or his demons really does occur. The Gospels record many instances in which the devil or his demons took control of a victim's personality. The Gospels also, however, distinguish between possession and ordinary illness (Mark 6:13).

Cases of demonic possession have been reported by many missionaries, especially by those who introduced the Gospel into pagan territory. Recent books by Malachi Martin and M. Scott Peck have been valuable in counteracting unbiblical skepticism among Christians and nonbelievers concerning the reality of Satan. The work of these men also sounds serious warning to Christians who are too eager to dabble with exorcism. Martin and Peck insist that exorcism poses great dangers, not only to the subject but also to the exorcist.

Demon Possession in the Past. In the New Testament, most cases of demonic possession occurred prior to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. In the book of Acts we find only a few such reports, and they generally took place in the early stages of evangelistic activity in an area. Peter cast out demons while in Jerusalem (5:16). Philip did so in Samaria (8:7). Paul delivered a young woman from a fortunetelling demon at Philippi (16:16-18) and cast out

indwelling demons at Ephesus (19:11,12). None of these cases involved a demon-possessed believer. Moreover, the Epistles make no mention of demon possession and give no instructions for exorcism. It appears that the men whom God chose to write the Epistles didn't view demon possession as a serious problem in the church.

Present-day Demon Possession. We should not equate mental illness with demon possession, as some did in the past and are doing today. Malachi Martin has warned:

Many people suffering from illnesses and diseases well known to us today such as paranoia, Huntington's chorea, dyslexia, Parkinson's disease, or even mere skin diseases (psoriasis and herpes I, for instance) were treated as people "possessed" or at least as "touched" by the devil (*Hostage to the Devil*, p.11).

It does not follow, however, that there is no demon possession today. Missionaries still encounter it in pagan cultures, and it may become more frequent as people increasingly go back to pagan ideas and drift into the occult.

M. Scott Peck writes:

As a hardheaded scientist--which I assume myself to be--I can explain 95 percent of what went on in these cases by traditional psychiatric dynamics . . . But I am left with a critical 5 percent that I cannot explain in such ways. I am left with the supernatural . . . (*People of the Lie*, pp.195, 196).

Exorcism Today. The admission that some demon possession exists today must be countered by a serious warning about the grave dangers involved with exorcism. It should be resorted to only after all other possible spiritual, medical, and psychiatric avenues of treatment have been explored. And it should be attempted only by spiritually mature believers who are aware of the dangers. Ephesians 6:11 states that we will need the whole armor of God in order to "stand against the wiles of the devil."

One of the primary dangers associated with exorcism is the potential of leading a person into unreality and psychosis. As fallen people, each of us has a deep, largely unconscious fear of seeing our sins as they really are. Even Christians who have been growing in maturity for many years are quick to admit that they have not yet even begun to understand the darkest depths of their personal depravity. It is therefore very dangerous to suggest to a person that his bad thoughts and actions may be due to demonic influence. Such a suggestion is likely to cause a disturbed person to become obsessed with the demonic--projecting the responsibility for his own personal evil upon "outside" demonic forces. In turn, the victim of demonic obsession is then likely to exhibit the symptoms of false possession, in which he unconsciously imitates the symptoms of actual possession (including voice changes and apparent alterations of personality).

Ironically, a victim of false possession may actually become possessed by demons if he is encouraged to continue abdicating responsibility for his own sinful behavior. By pointing out the dangers of demonic obsession and false possession, we are by no means denying the reality of demonic influences. Demonic influences may be involved in many (or even most) cases of

obsession or false possession. But it is impossible to rid a person of demonic influence as long as he has not yet faced the "core" problem of his personal sin and rebellion.

Exorcism, then, should not be undertaken until all other factors--physical, psychological, and spiritual--have been carefully explored.

In summary, the silence of the epistles on the matter of demon possession does not imply that demonic possession is not real. We may infer, however, that Christians shouldn't worry about needing exorcisms for the expulsion of demons. The supernatural power of the Holy Spirit is sufficient to drive even the influence of Satan from the life of a believer who deals with his sins and seeks to do God's will.

THE ONLY ANSWER TO SATAN'S LIE

Just as Satan successfully tempted Adam and Eve to sin, he still tempts each of us today. His lies don't change. Satan still tells us, "You can't trust God. He isn't concerned about your happiness. There is no danger in disobeying His laws. He knows that you can be equal to Him. You know what is best for you."

Satan's lie that God cannot be fully trusted can be countered only by the gospel with its doctrine of the incarnation. Man cannot answer the devil's lie with an appeal to nature or human experience. These can present mixed messages, sometimes giving the impression that God is good and at other times implying just the opposite. The natural world is merciless, offering horrible spectacles of terror and suffering. Catastrophes such as storms, floods, and earthquakes claim thousands of innocent lives, and scores of terrible diseases spread death and despair. The natural man is easily convinced that any evidences of God's love, goodness, and mercy are only a cruel joke in light of the *real* world--the world ruled by the law of fang and claw.

Each of us has had his own experience of the ruthless realities of a fallen world. Disease and accidents have unexpectedly crippled and killed family members or friends. Many of us have been hardened and disillusioned by betrayal at the hands of people we trusted. To harden ourselves against the pain of further disappointment and betrayal, we have become like actors in an old-fashioned melodrama. We conceal our true faces behind masks, driven by fear to play a role rather than to allow others to see us as we really are.

God understood the effects of our fears on our darkened minds. He knew that we were not capable of resisting Satan's lies--that our personal experiences of life in a fallen world would cause us to have insurmountable doubts about His goodness and love. Only a supreme act of grace could overcome the deep impression made by natural evil and satanic lies. This is one of the reasons God became a man.

By entering our dimension of time and space, God allowed us to see a reality far above that of our fallen world. In the person of Jesus Christ, the holy light of God's love shone brilliantly in the midst of our world's darkness, dispelling Satan's power to deceive us (John 1:9,10; Heb. 2:14,15).

God knows the earthly sorrows of His creatures. He has embraced us in our sin and weakness-- personally sharing our experience of fear, alienation, and death. The apostle Paul wrote:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

When we believe what God says in His Word about Christ, we will be delivered from doubt about His goodness. We will also be freed from the fear that He in His holiness will condemn us. Instead of trying to flee from Him into philosophies that deny His existence, we can approach Him. We can be realistic about our sinfulness and yet be confident in His forgiving grace.

HOW CAN WE DEFEAT SATAN?

On the basis of the salvation God has provided for us, the Scriptures lay out practical guidelines by which we can defeat Satan.

Have Confidence in God. The first decision we must make to be freed from Satan's power is to choose to trust God. We must acknowledge our helplessness, sinfulness, and lost condition. Then we must accept the free gift of salvation He has offered us in Christ and stand before God clothed in His Son's righteousness (Phil. 3:1-9; Titus 3:5).

Submit to God and Resist Satan. Although Christ has given us authority over Satan (1 John 4:4), we can exercise it only as we submit ourselves to God and resist the enemy (Eph. 6:11; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8,9).

Be Aware of Satan's Strategies. Satan can take advantage of us if we are "ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). For example, by harboring anger, we "give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27); by depriving our marriage partner of sexual intimacy, we give Satan an opportunity to tempt us (1 Cor. 7:5); by placing an unqualified man in a position of leadership in the church, we take the chance of making him vulnerable to pride and to "fall into the same condemnation as the devil" and "the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6,7).

Put on the Armor of God. Using the metaphor of a well-equipped Roman soldier, Paul told how we can be prepared for spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:11-18).

- *The belt of truth.* Since Satan depends on deceit to maintain his power, our first line of defense is always to be truthful. We must never distort or misrepresent the truth, regardless of any advantage we might gain by doing so.
- *The breastplate of righteousness.* Any sin in our life leaves us open to Satan's attack. Even though we are given the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21), we must still continually put on the protection of holy living.
- *The shoes of the gospel of peace.* With our feet firmly planted on the truth that we are at peace with God and that He is on our side, we can stand firmly against Satan's attacks.

- *The shield of faith.* In order to quench the "fiery darts" of Satan's temptations, we must trust and believe what God has said about every area of our life.
- *The helmet of salvation.* This is the confidence that there is coming in the future a great victory celebration. It's also referred to as the "hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:8). This helmet protects us against Satan's two-edged sword of discouragement and doubt.
- *The sword of the Spirit.* Since the Word of God is the basis of our faith, we need to learn how to wield it with authority. Scripture is our best offensive weapon against the devil (Matt. 4:1-11).

After he described the various elements of the armor, Paul said that we are to be in constant prayer. Prayer expresses our dependence on God. We can fight against Satan only "in the [strength of the] Lord and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10). In the power of Christ with the armor of the Spirit we will be victors.