

Satan Hates You And Has A Terrible Plan For Your Life

The bad news: We have an enemy who actively seeks to destroy us. The good news: In Christ, we have the authority to keep him at bay until his final defeat.

by Timothy Warner *Discipleship Journal* Issue #81 May/June 1994

The New Testament frequently reminds us that we have a spiritual enemy (Mt. 6:13, 2 Cor. 11:3, Eph. 6:10–18, Jas. 4:7). Peter further warns us to be "self-controlled and alert" around this enemy, whom he clearly identifies as the devil (1 Pet. 5:8). But unless we understand who our enemy is and what his tactics are, we give him a great strategic advantage over us.

Who Is Satan?

Just as the Bible nowhere presents an argument for the existence of God, it nowhere gives us an obvious explanation of who Satan is or where he came from. Jesus' reference to "the devil and his angels" (Mt. 25:41), John's account of the war in heaven between Michael and his angels and "the dragon and his angels" (Rev. 12:7), and the possible reference to him in Ezk. 28:14 as a "guardian cherub" have led many to the conclusion that he was a high-ranking angel who rebelled against God and led a group of the angels to follow him in rebellion.

Paul tells us that the coming of the lawless one at the end of this age "will be in accordance with the work of Satan." This imposter under Satan's control "will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple . . . proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:4, 2 Thess. 2:9). Satan was acting out this ambition to be God when he tempted our Lord to fall down and worship him in exchange for all the kingdoms of the world (Mt. 4:8–9).

We know that Satan will never achieve his goal of being like God, and he knows it. No matter where we put Revelation 12 (describing a vanquished Satan and his angels) in view of the end times, Satan knows that he has a limited time to pursue his diabolical purposes (Rev. 12:12). Yet spiritual warfare is a fact of life as long as this enemy is still loose on the earth and the final victory of the Kingdom of God is in the future.

God allows Satan to retain his power and operate as a part of this world because God's sovereignty over the world is not in question. God is able to use the work even of this enemy to accomplish His own purposes—to make us stronger rather than weaker.

We can conclude, then, that Satan is a powerful angel who rebelled against God and now sees God and God's children as his special enemies. The other angels who went along with the rebellion are what we now call demons (Jude 6).

What Are Satan's Objectives?

Satan's goals grow out of his jealousy and hatred of God. What does Satan hope to accomplish?

Keep unbelievers in the dark. Satan would like to rule the world. Since that will never happen in the ultimate sense, he has to settle for something less as he deals with people.

For the unredeemed his strategy is to keep them from hearing and receiving the truth of the gospel. Paul tells us that "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Satan tries to keep them

from even hearing the message. If an unbeliever hears but does not understand, Jesus tells us that "the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart" (Mt. 13:19).

Render believers spiritually ineffective. Believers are in a position to bring glory to God by their very lives, and that's something Satan is committed to prevent. In the Ten Commandments it's clear believers are not to "take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Ex. 20:7, *NAS*). God's intent was far more than to prohibit the use of His name in oaths or curses. He was saying we should not be called "children of God" and then not live in a manner that points others to God. We are not to take the name of God on ourselves by saying we are His children and then not reflect His character. That's why Paul says, "Whether you eat or drink [the most basic functions in life] or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

Peter says Satan's aim is to "devour" us (1 Pet. 5:9). The root meaning of the word *devour* is "to swallow." Satan will try to get us so swallowed up in worldly and self-centered living that we "fall short of the glory of God" (Ro. 3:23).

Hinder the work of God in the world. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that he had attempted to come to them many times, but "Satan thwarted us" (1 Thess. 2:18, *NAS*). In Ephesians 6 Paul characterized Christian life and ministry as struggling against the demonic powers in the world. He clearly implies that if we do not use the spiritual armor and weapons provided for us, the enemy will press the attack and keep us from carrying out our Lord's marching orders. Even when we are operating on faith, as Paul did, we are not spared the heat of the battle. Paul suffered many things (2 Cor. 6:3–10, 2 Cor. 11:23–33). Though much of his suffering came at the hands of human opponents, I believe Paul would have seen it as part of the battle with supernatural forces.

What Are Satan's Tactics?

The more an army knows about the strategies and tactics of an enemy, the more effective it will be in combat with that enemy. Paul indicated that in his warfare with Satan he was not "unaware of his schemes" (2 Cor. 2:11). Unfortunately, the Christian army today is often quite ignorant of Satan's schemes and becomes easy prey. What are some of Satan's basic warfare tactics?

Deceit. Jesus said that when the devil lies he speaks out of his very nature (Jn. 8:44). He first appears in the Bible in Genesis 3 using deception to lure Adam and Eve into sin (see 2 Cor. 11:3). In Rev. 12:9, (*NAS*) he is called the one "who deceives the whole world" (see also Rev. 18:23, Rev. 19:20, Rev. 20:10).

If a person is openly attacked, he can defend himself. If he is tempted, he can make a choice. But if he is deceived, he doesn't even know anything is wrong. In 2 Tim. 2:24–26 Paul says that some people in the church who were opposing the truth were in "the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." He also indicated that the way out of that trap is the truth (v. 25).

Satan will deceive us about how powerful he is. Many people ascribe power to Satan that he doesn't have, simply by fearing even to talk about him. Satan then will capitalize on this fear by attacking us—usually when we're alone, when it's dark, and when we're in a weakened condition.

Satan also deceives us by offering us power to deal with the problem areas of our lives. People in all parts of the world, including what appears to be a highly secularized Western world, carry good luck charms, consult psychics and fortune-tellers, go to practitioners who use magic to heal diseases, consult with spirits claiming to be from people of past ages, consult the alignment of stars, and engage in a multitude of other activities we call the occult. Satan promises power but delivers only enough to keep his victims coming back, and he charges a very high price in the form of bondage in some area of a person's life.

Satan also deceives us about spiritual truth. Paul tells the Corinthians, "I am afraid that just as Eve was *deceived* by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be *led astray* from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). He wrote to Timothy: "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and *things taught by demons*" (1 Tim. 4:1).

The two most foundational truths that come under attack are the character of God and the identity of the believer as a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Once a person's concept of God is perverted, his concept of what it means to be a child of God is affected. This sometimes takes the form of blaming God for all the bad things that happen in life. It also takes the form of believing we have to reach a certain level of perfection before God will accept us. Since people may not live what they profess but will always live what they believe, success in spreading these wrong beliefs gives Satan an inroad in the most foundational area of our lives—our hearts (Prov. 4:23).

Accusation. Satan is also called "the accuser of our brothers" (Rev. 12:10). He accuses us to God and he accuses us to ourselves. God convicts us of sin by showing us how to deal with it through the Cross. Satan accuses us to discourage us and make us want to give up. He will sometimes put an evil thought in our minds and then say, "And you say you are a Christian—look what you're thinking!" I've talked with ministers and missionaries who've struggled with this. It's one of the reasons Paul tells us to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3–5).

Capitalizing on weakness. A standard *modus operandi* of Satan is to find a weakness in our lives and intensify it to a compulsive level (2 Cor. 10:3–5). Weaknesses such as the effects of trauma or a dysfunctional family or wrong patterns of thinking may open the door for his involvement. Satan doesn't fight fair. He's ruthless in his attacks, and God's protection is not automatic just because we are His children.

Oppression through demonization. In demonization, a demon holds some measure of control over a person. This relationship has often been called demon possession, but that is a misleading term and, if used at all, should refer only to the more extreme forms of demonic control over unbelievers.

Satan's henchmen, the demons, seek to establish strongholds in people—both Christians and nonChristians (2 Cor. 2:10–11, 2 Cor. 10:3–5, Eph. 4:27). Symptoms such as an inability to grow spiritually, compulsive thoughts or behaviors, and undiagnosable or untreatable physical symptoms may indicate a demonic stronghold. So do the more classic symptoms of superhuman strength, different voices, and an inability to cope with everyday life. A truly Spirit-filled believer will not be demonized—not because an evil Spirit cannot be where the Holy Spirit is (God is omnipresent) but because that person is appropriating the spiritual power and authority available to him as a child of God (Lk. 10:19, Eph. 1:19).

Oppression through demonized physical objects. God made it plain that His people should not bring certain religious objects into their homes. They were, in fact, to detest them and burn them (Deut. 7:25–26). Evil spirits can use such objects as a medium to come to people (Deut. 32:17, Ps. 106:37, 1 Cor. 10:19–20). For instance, a missionary child suffered severe nighttime disturbances until a ceremonial dagger hung in his room was removed and destroyed.

Physical affliction. Satan may also attack the physical body (Job 2:7, Mt. 9:32–33, Lk. 13:16, 2 Cor. 12:7). Sometimes physical attack is the result of doors we open to the enemy through our own sin, as in the case of a woman who had undiagnosable fevers and pain that moved about in her body. When she confessed and renounced her participation in occult practices, the fevers and the pain left with no recurrence.

Our Victory over Satan

It's easy to focus too much on what Satan can do and be intimidated. Instead, we should focus on our resources in Christ so we can meet Satan's challenges with confidence.

The decisive battle in spiritual warfare was fought and won by Christ at the Cross and the Resurrection. Paul wrote to the Colossians, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:15). The writer to the Hebrews affirmed this victory when he said, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Colossians 2:14–15). Our faith is in the victory of Christ and in our relationship to Him.

Luke gives us an interesting glimpse into the process many go through to learn of their spiritual authority over Satan. In Luke 10, he tells of Jesus sending seventy-two disciples out to practice what He had been teaching them. When they returned, they said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17). They seemed somewhat surprised at this. Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." I think He was saying their ministry had all the authority of the Kingdom of God behind it. To make it more explicit He said, "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you" [this does not make you some special group of privileged, gifted disciples], "but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" [being a child of God gives you this authority] (Luke 10:18–20).

John McMillan, in his little book *The Authority of the Believer*, compares our authority to that of a policeman. A policeman's authority does not reside in his own identity but in his position as a representative of the state. It doesn't matter whether he's one week out of the police academy or a twenty-year veteran. As policemen, both have the same authority.

So it is with the believer. It's not one's giftedness or age; it is being a child of God that gives us spiritual authority. Even a young child who knows the Lord can ward off the attacks of the enemy in the name of Jesus.

We are at war whether we like it or not. The only question is whether we can say with Paul "I have fought the good fight" (2 Tim. 4:7) by being "strong in the Lord and in his mighty power," taking our stand "against the devil's schemes" (Eph. 6:10–11).