

Speaking of the Devil

The Devil is in the Details – Just How Does He Work?

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

Speaking of the Devil: The Devil is in the Details — Just How Does He Work?

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: 1 Peter 5:8; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; James 1:13-14; Ephesians 4:22-32, and others.

Introduction

During my college years, we would sometimes use a method of witnessing known as the Four Spiritual Laws, developed by Campus Crusade for Christ. The first “law” stated, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” Implicit in that statement is God’s desire to accomplish the very best through our lives, starting with the experience of saving faith in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament put a special spin on that notion with the words:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Jesus’ own words bring that plan to fulfillment:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10).

The full, abundant, and hopeful life — one with a *future* out of harm’s way — is the ultimate destiny of those who truly follow Jesus Christ. But, as Jesus’ words clearly state, there is a *thief* bent on stealing that future and killing that hope, and bringing us down to death.

And so, we are able to frame another “law”: *Satan hates you and has a horribly destructive plan for your life.* He wants the worse for us so that he might discredit God’s good creation. When we agree to share in Satan’s plans, we collude with him in opposing God’s plan. The whole human project began with just such collusion. Rational creatures made in God’s image agreed to become codependent with a Serpent — a creature of lesser honor — and reconstruct a plan formed by creaturely wisdom not by God’s wisdom. The plan was serpentine at its heart and was the result of *temptation*.

In this week’s study we want to look at how Satan achieves his purpose. As we explore this subject, we will make some important discoveries about his strategies.¹ In last week’s study, we noted that the Devil has been thrown out of heaven and his activities limited to the space-time universe where we live (Revelation 12). His mood is resentful and bent on settling an old score with God. We are his targets since God has placed us at the center of His plan for the renewal of creation — something Satan does not want to happen. He is committed to destroying everything which he cannot have.

Temptation: Satan’s Main Plan

Temptation is his central strategy, and it is calculated to lay us low and render us inoperative within God’s kingdom program. There is an important distinction between *testing* and *tempting*. *God tests* us to reveal our true character and to strengthen us in the face of adversity. *Satan tempts* us in order to bring dishonor to both us and God. He wants to see us *fail*, whereas God, by testing us, wants to see us *refined*. From James we hear:

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by

¹ Warren Wiersbe developed this theme concisely in his little book *The Strategy of Satan* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979).

his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers (James 1:13-16).

Satan is the one who deceives, but God always deals transparently with us.

Notice how our “own desire” supplies fuel for temptation’s fire. An old adage says, “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” A slight modification of that truism might be, “Our own desires are the devil’s raw materials.” We commented in the *Introduction* that the original human pair colluded with the serpent in a co-dependent relationship. For us, strong desire — the exaggerated “wants” of normal human need — makes us vulnerable to the power of suggestion. The terms “lure” and “entice” come from the following Greek expressions:

1. *exlekō* which means “to draw or drag out.” This is a hunting and fishing metaphor and refers to the use of bait or lure to draw out game into the open where it can be captured or killed.
2. *deliazō* which means not only to lure and entice but to actually catch or trap. The same word appears in 2 Peter 2:14, 18:

They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They **entice** unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! ... For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they **entice** by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.

When human beings live primarily by self-driven values, they are easy prey for temptation. Moreover, the process of temptation which begins with misplaced desire snowballs quickly into sin and then death. James uses a growth image in this sequence, suggesting that sin is capable of stages of development (e.g. “is fully grown”). Having self-control which holds the desires in check is a prerequisite for the successful defeat of temptation. The Holy Spirit enables self-control through his rich fruit cultured in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23).

Predator seeking prey: that is how Satan operates within the world. Lion imagery would have gotten the attention of Peter’s audience most of whom lived in areas where wild animals roamed freely and were constantly on the hunt:

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8).

Such language grew out of the Old Testament and its understanding of how pagan nations did the bidding of covert evil powers (see Daniel 7, for example). The goal of temptation is to *devour* not merely to harass or to trouble. The Greek word *katapinō* means “to swallow down.” When Peter describes the movement of the devil, he uses a rather ordinary word, *peripateō*, meaning “to walk, move about.” It’s almost a casual kind of demeanor as the lion slowly moves across the ground, throwing back his head and bellowing out his threatening roar, thoroughly intent on its prey.

The Psalmist uses similar language in Psalm 17:12 where the wicked one is “eager to tear” and “lurking in ambush,” in league with those “deadly enemies who surround me” who “close their hearts to pity,” “speak arrogantly,” “surround our steps,” and “set their eyes to cast us to the ground” (17:9-12). In 22:13, lions are called “ravens and roaring.” Destruction and lions are literary equivalents in 35:17. Human rulers embody Satan’s leonine ways (Proverbs 28:15). Imprisoned for his faithfulness to God, Daniel finds himself in the midst of lions, and when God rescues him, the pagan king declares that He is the living God “who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions” (Daniel 6:26-27; see Hebrews 11:33). The roar of the lion meant “fear” to its prey (Amos 3:8). The New Testament, in addition to the Peter text, employs the lion as a symbol for threats to those preaching the Gospel (2 Timothy 4:17).

It’s also worth noting that the New Testament transforms the lion image and applies it to Jesus. He is the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Revelation 5:5). Positive connotations for lion also appear in the Old Testament where that image represents some aspect of God’s own character as seen in the vision of Ezekiel (1:10; 10:14). This is echoed in Revelation 4:7. God is the true Lion while Satan is the parody and counterfeit.

Satanic Strategy: Who, What, and How

The character of Satan, which we examined in last week’s study, translates into his strategy for the defeat of the Christian. *Who* he is directly influences *what* he does, and *how* he does it. In this week’s study, we analyze the

characteristics of the devil and then tease out his methods. As a result, we will discover four main insidious qualities of Satan. Each of these, in turn, influences his 1) target, 2) weapon, and 3) purpose.²

Character trait #1: Deceiver

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44)

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him (Revelation 12:9)

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3)

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist (2 John 1:7)

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die."⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths (Genesis 3:1-7)

Target: The Mind

Perhaps the most telling character trait of Satan is contained in the words: "When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." The earliest encounter of human beings with personified evil is Genesis 3 where the serpent "messes with the minds" of the first human pair. Through a series of carefully crafted questions, the woman and the man are led to believe that God was not telling the whole truth but that the serpent was. We might call this "the lie about the lie." The conversation between the creature and the humans focused on the mind, one of the features belonging to the image of God. Throughout the long history since Eden, people have lived with the consequences of losing the truth through a misuse of thought. Cultural anthropologists have noted that in many primitive cultures (with ties to the ancient world) the fine art of deception was actually treated as a virtue and not as a vice.³ Altering the truth gave advantage over other people, especially those who expected to hear the truth.

When post-modern culture thinks of truth as tailor-made to the individual, truth becomes a product of human manufacture rather than a standard for judging the claims of others. Satan counted on his ability to fabricate lies and package them in the form of truth. In so doing he marketed his own ideas in the guise of truth and then sold the product to the first human consumers, man and woman. Truth to the devil was what he wanted human beings to believe so that he might manipulate them into doing what he wanted them to do. His flurry of questions to them left the impression that they were somehow participants in the discovery of the truth, when in fact they were objects of deception. He was, so to speak, "leading the witness" when he queried them in Genesis 3.

Scripture always has a low view of *the lie*. Consider these texts:

² In following this approach, we are tracking with Wiersbe's treatment, *op. cit.*, 4-88.

³ Refer to Robert B. Edgerton, *Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 63, 67. The moving story *Peace Child* by Don Richardson illustrates treachery as primitive virtue (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1975 edition).

⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator (Colossians 3:9-10).

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!- ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:17-24)

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).

The role of thought in shaping actions is enormous. As Paul notes in the Ephesian passage above, a darkened understanding alienates us from the life of God and hardens out hearts which become callous, sensual, greedy and impure. Right thinking isn't just about logic, it's also about loyalty to truth — God's truth. Failing to have a mind shaped by God leads to all forms of character failure: "corrupt through deceitful desires." Paul called this "the old self with its practices." From the ancient Wisdom tradition we hear this proverb: "For as he thinks within himself, so he is" (Proverbs 23:7).

By contrast, the Word of God renews the mind by purifying it with the truth (John 17:17). Through mind-renewal, transformation of character is possible, along with "true righteousness and holiness." The following Scripture lay out the recipe for such dramatic change:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8).

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you (Isaiah 26:3).

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:6).

Shaping the mind involves reaching back into memories and forward through imagination. Satan knows this, and he uses both to bend our thinking in his direction. "Remember that failure?" He tries to discourage us. "Imagine how much better you'd be if ..." He tries to tempt us.

Weapon: Lies

"Father of lies ... who deceives the whole world." We've already read those characterizations of Satan from the Bible. Genesis 3 is the casebook for evaluating the methods of the Tempter. In that famous text, Satan's name is not mentioned at all. Everything evil in that story happens under the guise of a creaturely serpent, a snake-like being over which God had already placed human beings. They were to have dominion over "the creeping things" (Genesis 1:26), and they were to guard the garden which God made for them, making certain that all intruders were kept out. Satan was not allowed to overwhelm the first human pair. Much like the story of Job, God restricted the *form* in which temptation could take place. We can imagine God telling Satan, "Look, all you get is a snake. A talking snake." In the newly furnished garden, carefully prepared by God for His human partners, the serpent already slithered around, doing what serpents do. Adam had met him once before: when he named him (see Genesis 2:20). That was Adam's first act of administration in God's created world: to consider the behavior and character of the animals and then assign them designations. The act of naming involved a measure of control as well, and this concept persisted in the literature of the ancient world for centuries afterward.

But the human pair lost control and mismanaged their responsibilities to have dominion in the world. The cause was a lie.

1. Actually, the cause was a series of lies starting with the most basic question: “Has God said...?” Doubting, wondering, and guessing what God plainly said was the first step in “buying the lie.” One powerful feature of the lie used by the serpent involved *questioning* whether God had spoken at all.
2. Beyond that, another strategy of the lie was a direct *contradiction* of what God said. “You shall not die...”
3. Then, the serpent *substituted* his own lie for God’s truth: “You will be like God...” Irony abounds in this aspect of the serpent’s temptation. Had not Satan himself once boasted, “I will make myself like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:14)? And didn’t it turn out that he was badly self-deceived, as the Word of God declared, “...you have fallen from heaven...you have been cut down to the earth...” (14:12)? Yet, in spite of this obvious failure, the tempter persists in acting as if it is possible to “be like God” through deceptive methods and a distortion of truth. Knowing the reality of his own failure, the evil one pawns off his failed lie on the human race. Will they believe it?

Sadly, they will, although nothing in the Genesis 3 account suggests they were forced to do so. Paul summed up the situation famously in this text:

...because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen (Romans 1:25).

The Greek word for “exchanged” comes from the verb *metalassō* which can mean either “exchange” or “change.” It can also mean “to leave, to quit.” Clearly, the bargain struck here involves a loss of God’s truth and the acquisition of a lie in its place. Human beings made a bad deal with the devil, deceived into thinking they were getting something of greater value than what they were giving up. Paul teaches in this passage that the act of doing so was really a “worship and serve” transaction as well. What were they worshipping and serving? He tells us: “the creature rather than the creator.” In effect the serpent sought and succeeded at getting the worship and service of the human creation. Having once failed to “be like God” in actually seizing God’s throne, Satan succeeded in becoming a god to God’s human creation.

It would take a future son of Adam to set things right. Jesus, too, was offered the whole world *if he worshipped the devil*. He refused (Matthew 4:8-10). Satan could not offer Jesus godhood since he already had it! Failing this, he offered Jesus the world which he, Satan, imagined he himself actually owned. In one sense, it was true that the world was in bondage to Satan, but Jesus would soon acquire it, not by a bad bargain with the devil, but by redeeming it on the cross.

Satan’s temptation of human beings could not succeed unless they cooperated with him. How did they collude with the serpent’s temptation? Three times, the woman⁴ allowed her mind to wander off the path of truth. Her quotations of God’s Word suffered from three mistakes:

1. Failed to state *completely* what God said. In her quotation of Genesis 2:16, she left out the word “freely:” “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden...” (3:2). That single word underscored the gracious, loving, and goodly character of God toward His human creations. God is generous and lavish in caring for them, yet the woman allowed the serpent’s lie to misshape the language of God’s original invitation. When God gave us His word, the Bible, He chose to use the rich features of human language to fully communicate truth to us. Inspiration is *plenary* — full and complete — and we must exercise due care in honoring the form in which God gave us His Word. When we fail to do this, we give Satan an opportunity to add his own words instead. Moreover, worded this way, the woman’s version makes God seem *less gracious*.
2. *Added* to what God said. The original command not to eat from the tree of good-and-evil-knowledge contained no other qualifications (2:17). However, when asked by the serpent about God’s command, the woman adds the words “...or touch it” (3:3). Some scholars have long noted this innovation and suggested that the woman was revealing, ever so slightly, her peevishness at God’s restrictions on this tree, as if God

⁴ The woman and the man together constituted a single humanity during the course of this temptation. A careful reading of Genesis 3:6 reveals the plain truth that neither partner acted alone in giving in to the serpent’s temptation. The operative words are these: “...she gave some to her husband **who was with her**...” The text wants the reader to know that the human pair sinned in concert with each other.

was a controlling deity who placed heavy burdens on His human creations (see the contrast in 1 John 5:3). This version makes God's command seem *more grievous*.

3. *Changed* what God said. When the woman explains the penalty for disobeying God's command, she uses language which sounds a bit less certain: "...lest you die..." (3:3). The Hebrew prefixes the particle conjunction *pen-* to the imperfect verb form *mût* — "to die." However, the original statement from God had stronger language: "...you will surely die..." (2:17). The underlying Hebrew uses the verb *mût* twice: 1) the infinitive absolute (*mōt*), followed by, 2) the imperfect form. The infinitive used in this form *intensifies* the meaning of the finite verb (something like, "dying, you will die"). The woman greatly softens this intensity with her own use of *pen* ("lest") a tentative alternative with a lot less "bite" to it.

By planting a suggestion in the human's mind which contradicted the original Word of God, the serpent set in motion a host of other thoughts largely fueled by the woman's desires and fears. Emotions are not evil in themselves, but relying on them apart from God's wisdom leads us away from God's original Word. The senses are not evil in themselves, but relying on them apart from God's wisdom is a recipe for error and sin. Lacking an accurate reading of the Word, the woman looks at the tree as a thing-in-itself, able to give her 1) food, 2) beauty, and 3) wisdom (3:6). But the tree had none of those things apart from light of God's truth — indeed apart from God making it that way! Rather than viewing the tree through the eyes of God, she looked at it through her own eyes. Scripture reminds us elsewhere: "Be not wise *in your own eyes*" (Proverbs 3:7; 12:15; 26:5, 12; 28:11; Isaiah 5:21).

The serpent, embodying the mission of Satan, counterfeited the truth of God. He did not ask the woman to believe a lie, anymore than a crook would advertise his counterfeit bills before passing them. The lie was passed off as if it were the truth. More importantly, the serpent sets the stage for his temptation of human beings by making the lie *look like the truth and feel like the truth*. In this regard, he has many other accomplices throughout history:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:13-14; see also, 11:26; Matthew 13:38; Galatians 1:8; Romans 10:3; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10; Revelation 13:8).

Purpose: Ignorance of God's Will

When Christians pray the model prayer, the "Our Father," they remind themselves of God's long-term purpose: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Satan has a counterfeit purpose: to thwart, deflect, undermine, and frustrate the will of God on earth. Recall how Revelation 12 depicts the present earthly situation: Satan has been cast from heaven to earth, he is angry and resentful, he wages war against God's people, and his time is sort. With that set of circumstances in mind, we can see that keeping God at bay is Satan's present purpose. He plainly does not want God's will done on earth as it is in heaven. Temptation is his strategy, and keeping people *ignorant of God's will* is his purpose *as a deceiver*.

The importance of knowing God's will and doing God's will appears throughout Scripture:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).

I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart (Psalm 40:8).

The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations (Psalm 33:11).

And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth...' (Acts 22:14).

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:17).

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Colossians 1:9).

as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart (Ephesians 6:6).

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work (John 4:34).

that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God (Colossians 4:12).

And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:17).

Temptation by Satan seeks to keep us in the dark about *what God wants* so that by our actions we end up doing *what Satan wants*.

Character trait #2: Destroyer

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat (Luke 22:31).

They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon ("the destroyer") (Revelation 9:11).

And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he [Job] is in your hand; only spare his life (Job 2:6).

Target: The Body

Of the disasters which beset Job, perhaps the loss of his health and the suffering of his body stand out most sharply. Seeing him sitting in the ash heap, scraping his sores with potsherds, cannot fail to evoke sympathy and outrage. Why should such calamity happen to a righteous man? There is much about the book of Job that mystifies the casual reader. Even the serious student of these hundreds of Hebrew lines recoils at the seeming contradictions posed by flagrant evil running wild in one man's life. We cannot solve all the problems posed by this ancient text. Its earliest readers probably got it better than we do today. They might well tolerate the outrageous bargain between the devil and God, whereas we are only filled with nothing but questions. Our focus on the Job story in this instance is to see *how Satan tried to destroy Job in order to discredit God*. As the Revelation 9:11 text reveals, his name is Abaddon (Apollyon), "the destroyer."

We are not just bare intelligent minds free floating in the universe like some badly told science fiction story. God made human beings as a unity: mind and body joined together in expression of God's own image. Through our bodies we give expression to the character of God in the *visible* world. Our minds encompass our *invisible* selves, but our bodies reveal to the world who we are, and who God is.

By targeting our bodies, the devil finds ways to destroy this link we have with the physical world — and it is in this world that God intends to bring His will to completion. Job's wife understood this when she counseled her suffering husband, "Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). During the ministry of Jesus, attacks on people's bodies took the form of illness and demon possession (Matthew 9:32-33; Luke 13:11-17; Matthew 17:14-18). In more general, but no less deadly terms, John's Gospel records Jesus' own words:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10).

Within the context of this passage, "the thief" is the devil and his earthly agents.

Why is our body such a crucial target for the devil? A few passages will suffice in reply:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

...it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death (Philippians 1:20).

...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness (Romans 6:12-13).

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us (2 Corinthians 4:7).

God lives within His world in a visible way through our bodies, and by the Holy Spirit He implements His purpose in the world. Our bodies belong to God, and they are His prize possessions — His temples (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19). Counter to God's intentions for our bodies are the purposes of Satan who wants to use them to work against the will of God. When we dishonor our bodies, we dishonor God. When we hide our god-given abilities, the light of God does not shine for His glory. Allowing Satan a role in shaping our actions, our bodies become instruments of sin and ultimately death. If we boast about our bodies, we rob God of the credit for what they can do. Each time we sin, we are giving Satan the loan of our bodies for his evil works. Either God is glorified through our bodies, or Satan is.

The discipline body prepares it for God's service, whereas the undisciplined body is fair game for Satan's control (1 Corinthians 9:27). The highest form of consecration involves our body:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1).

We have already quoted 12:2 in connection with our minds (see above). However, even before Paul addresses the renewal of our minds, he urges the surrender of our bodies to God and His service. Of course, in the context of the Hebrew worldview, both mind and body (*sōma*) are an inseparable unity. However, as dimensions of human life, we can talk about them in distinct ways. Worship is done with the body as well as the mind and heart. In fact, a careful study of Old Testament texts reveals the many-faceted ways the body functions in worship: lifted hands, shouting voices, bowed heads, arduous pilgrimages, and active service — each of these involved the body devoted to God.

Satan wants to silence our voices and cripple our bodies, thus robbing God of the worship and service due to Him.

Weapon: Suffering

Technically, suffering is experienced in the mind, but since we can hardly separate this from the body, we usually always speak of *bodily* suffering. Job's story immortalizes the impact of suffering on the body, especially as it affects our relationship with God. "These are the times which try men's souls." Thomas Paine gets credit for this commentary on adversity lived out during the American Revolution. However, we might want to fix that up a bit: "soul" isn't just about the immaterial self, hidden inside our bodies. *We are our souls*; our souls *are us*. When the "soul suffers," *we* suffer. More accurately, our bodies are the target and suffering is Satan's weapon used against it. For Job, suffering began with a much altered landscape around him involving loss of family, property, and finally health.

The world seems out of control when the body suffers. Anyone afflicted with pain from disease or injury can relate to the impulse to cry out, "Just stop it!" Faced with terminal illness and long-term suffering, patients regularly exclaim, "I can't take this anymore!" Going through withdrawal from drug or alcohol addiction, the addict mourns, "Will this ever end?" Those statements disclose the sense of helplessness brought about by suffering. From Job we learn that God limits the extent of Satan's activities — "Don't take his life," was the stern warning from God in Job 1-2.

Jesus had a similar frame of reference in mind when he told Peter that Satan wanted to “sift him like wheat,” but that he, Jesus, would pray for Peter’s faith (Luke 22:31-32). The mystery of human suffering has filled thousands of volumes across the centuries. Not all suffering is the same. Some comes as the product of nature’s processes. Satan may attempt to manipulate these in malevolent ways, turning God’s good creation against Him. Human beings frequently become entangled in this enterprise and fall victim to disease, injury, disaster, and death. Bodies are *vulnerable*, even as we view them as *valuable*. The useless, wasteful loss of human life infuriates us who see this as a travesty of divine justice. “How can God allow this?” No easy answers address this inquiry. However, part of the answer lies in the battleground where God and Satan are engaged in mortal combat. Lying behind the scenes, often imperceptible to the human eye, the conflict rages.

Implicated in this struggle are human beings with real bodies capable of pain. At times God directs the otherwise malicious attacks of Satan on our bodies so that they will have maximum positive effect on our character. Not all suffering is pointless. Consider:

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Hebrews 12:5-6).

In fact, God may well transform suffering intended for our hurt to become an instrument of improvement in our lives. Remember the famous story of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-50). Plenty of bad things happened to Joseph which seemed quite out of his control. His brothers despised him because their father favored him. Eventually their resentment turned to rage, and they sold him into slavery. Ending up in Egypt, he was the object of false accusations and went to prison. Before this long tale ends, he is at last restored to his brothers, while they harbor fear that one day he will retaliate when their father dies. Becoming aware of this, Joseph utters this important word of encouragement to his brothers:

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives (Genesis 50:20).

We might apply this to Satan’s efforts against us: he intends to harm us, but God re-directs the enemy’s agenda and achieves His own good purpose in our lives.

Over the origin of suffering we have little control. However, by wise and careful discernment, we are able to control the outcome.

Purpose: Impatient with God’s Will

From the insights of the New Testament, we learn the following about Job’s suffering:

Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful (James 5:11).

The greatest temptation facing Job was giving up on God as a result of his suffering. His wife’s “curse God and die” advice was calculated to foreshorten Job’s suffering. If Satan can wear us out with suffering, he stands a good chance of getting us to lash out at God, grow impatient, and demand immediate satisfaction for the injustice we experience. The text from *James* praises Job for his “steadfastness.” The underlying Greek word here is from the root verb *hupomenō*, which literally means “to remain, abide while being under something.” It applied to persons carrying a heavy load but not dropping it or falling under its weight. Enduring something faithfully, bravely, and calmly is one of the main meanings. Notice how James combines the patience of Job with “the purpose of the Lord.” In particular, Job comes to see that in the end the Lord is “compassionate and merciful.”

God may allow suffering as an opportunity for us to trust His goodness at work in our lives. Satan, on the other hand, desires that we fall down, give up, let go, cave in, and otherwise abandon our faith in God’s good purposes. Satan’s purpose is our impatience with God’s purpose. He destroys us by undercutting our persistent faith in a merciful God who has our best interests at heart.

The Bible sings the praise of patient endurance. A few examples will suffice:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness (James 1:2-3).

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised (Hebrews 6:12).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23).

Scripture illustrates the challenge of remaining faithful with some notable examples. Abraham and Sarah became impatient with God when they failed to produce a son in accordance with God's promise. They resorted to their own methods, using the concubine Hagar as "plan B." Saul, on the eve of a battle, refused to wait for Samuel to come and offer the expected sacrifices, plunging ahead on his own without God's approval. Peter, not wanting Jesus arrested, intervened with his sword in a futile effort to save Jesus from what proved to be the better plan for his life.

Sickness, poverty, adversity, and a host of other human tragedies can become the context for Satan's attack on our physical being with our resulting impatience to have the suffering done with. Our efforts under these circumstances can lead us to make bad choices, take fool-hearty risks, seek quick-fix solutions, and otherwise execute schemes outside the will of God. We fool ourselves into thinking that God isn't moving fast enough for us.

Job, in the midst of his trial, revealed a genuine faith and patience when he said:

But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold (Job 23:10).

There's something quite physical and bodily about that statement: a way to be taken, something to be tested, and gold to be purified at the end. Along with that, we hear a confidence that God "knows." Our troubled, suffering, and painful situation is well-known to him. As Christians, we also know that Jesus understood suffering beyond our comprehension. His suffering was "in the flesh" (1 Peter 4:1), and that ought to be assuring to us who experience the same.

Character trait #3: Ruler

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out (John 12:31).

I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me (John 14:30).

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil (1 Timothy 3:6-7).

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18).

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

People who hold power experience a special kind of temptation. It was the *arrogance* of power that brought Satan down. A ruler says to himself, "I have power. I can do things other people can't do. I can make decisions affecting countless lives. I speak and others obey. I have prerogatives others don't have." Deep inside those statements lies coiled the serpent's cunning. Probably the most fatal belief of persons with power is that they will never be caught if they misuse that power. Believing that power brings with it a certain *invisibility*, they make the strategic mistake of thinking they also have *invincibility* as well. ⁵ The wreckage of

⁵ Two examples from literature are worth mentioning. 1) Plato's famous story of Gyges Ring which gave its possessor the ability to become invisible, commit all sorts of self-serving crimes, and never be caught. 2) Tolkien's famous ring (*Hobbit, Lord of the Rings*) which also produces invisibility, but which causes its user to gradually lose his identity. Both examples show the dangers of power.

human history was the outcome of mistaken omnipotence. Satan said, “I will...” multiples times in Isaiah 14, but this self-assertion produced pride and his fall. So it is with human beings.

David had a similar experience as king of Israel. To be sure, he was a much better king than his predecessor, Saul, who failed to surrender power to God. But David had his own failings. We usually think about his sin with Bathsheba, the murder of Uriah, and the string of consequences as his worst sins. However, buried in the history of the Chronicler is another story of misshapen power. From 1 Chronicles 21:1-19 we learn of David’s overconfidence in his military might. David had been a warrior of significant fame. His efforts help rid Israel of the Philistine threat after numerous humiliations under King Saul. At last “in charge” of the kingdom, he decided to document the robustness of his armies by taking a census. The text plainly tells us that “Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.”

Target: The Will

David had what philosophers might call “the will to power.” Temptation in his case wasn’t about mind and body, but about *will*. From the will the whole of human life is unified. Minds inform, bodies act, but wills *decide*. The Bible usually speaks about *the heart* as the center of human existence, and locates in the heart human emotion, thought, and choice. We obey (or disobey) “from the heart” (Acts 7:39; Romans 6:17). The Old Testament describes full commitment to God as the center of Israel’s theology:

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

Jesus reminds his audience about their *inner* condition:

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person (Matthew 15:19-20).

Satan walks into friendly territory when he encounters the ordinary human will (heart). He may wield his wiles of temptation, but the raw materials are ready-made. He seeks allies and holds concert with the weaknesses which lie inside the prideful human life. He may tempt, but he has help!

Wiersbe offers a concise analysis at this point:

Satan is “the ruler of this world,” and you and I are rebellious aliens living in his territory. Because we are citizens of heaven, we obey heaven’s laws and submit to heaven’s Lord. Satan wants us to worship and serve him; he wants our will submitted to his will.⁶

Weapon: Pride

Flush with victories, David was susceptible to Satan’s suggestion to “number the people.” An inflated ego made him vulnerable. His spirit was defiled with pride as he thought about the achievements of the flesh. The New Testament speaks to that condition:

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Jesus’ story about the two brothers illustrates this point also (see Luke 15). The younger son was driven by sins of the flesh while his older brother succumbed to sins of the spirit, among them, pride of position as the eldest.

An appeal to pride figured into Satan’s temptation of Jesus:

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me" (Matthew 4:8-9).

Compare this to John’s analysis of living a worldly life:

For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world (1 John 2:16).

A heart which already “loves the world” (1 John 2:15) operates from motives fueled by pride, among others. Such a heart is fertile soil for temptation.

Peter reminds his readers about the dangers of pride:

⁶ *Op. Cit.*, 53.

... "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you (1 Peter 5:5-6).

David chose not to take God's word for it but proceeded to count the people for his own glory rather than God's. Perhaps he took his own press releases too seriously! Positions of power tempt persons to be proud. It doesn't need to be so, but is a known danger which leaders must guard against. Rather than allowing God to "exalt" them "at the proper time," they major on their own achievements at the expense of God's will.

Paul counsels his protégé, Timothy, not to promote neophyte Christians to high church office for this very reason:

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil (1 Timothy 3:6).

Similar temptations faced the church, as these two texts illustrate:

I have written something to the church, but Diotrefes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority (3 John 1:9).

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, 4 he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

Satan's temptations affect persons within church government, but also in the teaching of false doctrine. In both instances, the question of pride rears its ugly head.

Purpose: Independence of God's Will

Living in dependence on God is a mark of Christian faith, and it acknowledges the truth of Acts 17:28, "In Him we live, move and have our being." By contrast, Satan wants human beings to live like gods and to choose creatures rather than the Creator as the object of their worship (Romans 1:25). Cut off from God, we are easy prey for Satan's control in his usurped role as "ruler of this world."

Pride says, "I can do everything by myself. I don't need God." Satan heartily approves of this attitude. The Old Testament tells the story of another king who succumbed in this way. His name was Uzziah:

In Jerusalem he made engines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones. And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. ¹⁶ But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense (2 Chronicles 26:15-16).

Warnings about such conduct go all the way back to Moses:

And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you- with great and good cities that you did not build, ¹¹ and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant- and when you eat and are full, ¹² then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

This passage comes from the same context as the Great *Shema* ' which commands Israel to give their whole heart to God. Moses warns about the pride which comes from acting in self-sufficient ways, acting as if one's own skills have produced success rather than God's power. Paul wisely reminds us:

For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:10).

As the "prince of the power of the air," Satan tempts us to live with our spiritual noses in the air. In so doing, he seeks to rob God of the glory which belongs to Him. Only God is the true source of power and rule. His kingdom is all about His "reign" over what He has made, and he invites us to share in that rule. Satan contradicts God and attempts to sway our allegiance to him and his purposes. He wants us to seize the throne rather than wait to be given it by God.

Character trait #4: Accuser

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God (Revelation 12:10).

Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ,¹¹ so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs (2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Why would Satan want to accuse us? The answer: he is a fault-finder who looks for every opportunity to discredit God by pointing out the weaknesses of His creation. No doubt, Satan took great pleasure in exploiting the gift of *freedom* God gave to His special human creations. In his own case, he used freedom to rebel against God and start a counter-God movement in the universe. If he is successful at exporting this abuse of freedom, he can point his fingers at us and tell God, "See what miserable failures you have made!" Every time we sin, the enemy of God gleefully watches from the sidelines, believing that imperfections in us somehow prove imperfections in God, the One who made us.

Buried in the Old Testament Minor Prophets⁷ is the book of *Zechariah* which was written after the Jewish people returned from Babylonian exile and began to settle back in their land. A series of stunning visions tell the story of this return, its meaning, and its future. Among them is an account of how the Jewish priesthood was fully established again, led by a man named Joshua (no relation to the earlier Joshua whose exploits are told in the book bearing his name). Here's the basic text of that vision:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.² And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?"³ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments.⁴ And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments."⁵ And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by.⁶ And the angel of the LORD solemnly assured Joshua,⁷ "Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here (Zechariah 3:1-7).

Target: Heart/Conscience

Although the coronation of Joshua as High Priest took place on earth, a spiritual battle was raging in heaven. The purpose of visions like this one is to allow us to glimpse what is really taking place behind the scenes. In that sense, the story has strong parallels to Job's. Satan knows that just about everybody who came back from Babylonian exile had somehow been tainted by their pagan sojourn, much like the Israelites had been influenced centuries before by their slavery in Egypt. A careful reading of books like *Ezra*, *Nehemiah*, *Haggai*, and *Malachi*, as well as *Zechariah*, disclose the vagaries and sins of the Jewish people upon their return to the land. In the passage cited above, Joshua faces the accusations of Satan who attacks his conscience with words of guilt and shame. "Look how dirty this man Joshua is! He's been defiled by my successful attempts in Babylon and now back in Israel. How can God use you, Joshua, dirty as you are?" It's not hard to imagine that cynical and derogatory speech uttered at Joshua's expense.

Attacking the conscience with false guilt and exaggerated claims is Satan's goal. He targets that part of human nature where matters of good and evil, right and wrong, and honor and shame are judged. Each sin we commit

⁷ The word "minor" in this label does not imply *less important*, but comes from the Latin word which means "smaller." The designation grew out of the grouping of books known in the Hebrew Bible as *The Twelve*, a collection of shorter prophetic books. Originally, they were stored on a single scroll and consisted of: *Hosea*, *Joel*, *Amos*, *Obadiah*, *Jonah*, *Micah*, *Nahum*, *Habakkuk*, *Zephaniah*, *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi*.

or each failure we face become targets for Satan to humiliate and demean us: “Satan, standing at his right hand to accuse him.” Sometimes other people are Satan’s agents in “spreading on the guilt.” High doses of legalism are actually prescribed by Satan, and they are served up by self-righteous people. Such persons are called “fault-finders,” and the Bible hasn’t much good to say about them (see Jude 1:16). The religious leaders followed Jesus around looking for something with which they might trap him (Mark 3:2; 15:3; Matthew 12:10; 27:12).

Weapon: Accusation

Therefore, Satan’s weapon in this case is his ability to find fault and accuse. The Old Testament frequently writes about the snares laid by those who *accuse* God’s people in an effort to discredit them. Consider the following examples:

Those who repay my good with evil slander me when I pursue what is good (Psalm 38:20).

May my accusers perish in shame; may those who want to harm me be covered with scorn and disgrace (Psalm 71:13).

In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer (Psalm 109:4, 6, 20, 25, 29).

At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones (Daniel 6:24).

It is the legitimate role of conscience to alternately “accuse or excuse” (Romans 2:15). However, the conscience may become overly sensitized to such an extent that the smallest things condemn us. Satan exploits this tendency and tries to make us see ourselves in a much diminished light. We are left thinking, “Now what good are we to God?” If we believe Satan’s lie, temptation succeeds and we are defeated. Then we become hopeless and our spirits are broken.

Purpose: Indictment of God’s Will

Words like “regret” or “remorse” usually have to do with how *we feel* about our sin or weakness. By themselves, they are not especially helpful. You may recall that Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus, suffered from these twin emotions after his deed was done and he was paid for it:

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders (Matthew 27:3).

The Greek word for “remorse” used here is *metamelomai*, a term which has to do with regret and feeling sorry. It is not the same word which means “repent” (*metanoēō*). Satan does not want his agents to repent, but he certainly doesn’t mind if they have emotions like regret or remorse. So badly did Judas feel and so unable to truly experience repentance, that he “went and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:5). In this case, Satan’s role as accuser was augmented by his role as destroyer. Judas could never get passed the guilt of his sin, and Satan exploited that fact to the fullest extent.

Whereas Satan wants us to keep our sin and its guilt, God wants to forgive us. The true oppose of forgiveness in this instance is accusation. God intends guilt to lead us to repentance and confession, and at that point he forgives us. Christ died on the cross so that we might be forgiven. By contrast, Satan throws our sins in our faces and keeps us sinners in our hearts. Old sins can linger in our memories and influence the feelings we have about ourselves. This is not God’s will, but an indictment of God’s will.

When the Corinthian church struggled with an especially egregious sin, the person in question was temporarily put out of the assembly (read 1 Corinthians 5). This was church discipline, and its goal was the repentance and recovery of the sinner. Had the person truly repented and sought forgiveness, such measures would have been unnecessary. However, the offender persisted and refused to get right with God and the church, and so the discipline was applied. Much time passed, and finally the person made the necessary course correction, returning to God in repentance and faith. According to 2 Corinthians 2, the church was slow to accept him

back, and so Paul needed to remind the Corinthians Christians, “Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority” (2 Corinthians 2:6). He then elaborates:

...so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him... so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs (2 Corinthians 2:7-8, 11).

Had the church refused this counsel, they would have played right into the hands of Satan’s efforts to accuse the conscience of the repentant brother and leave him in his sorrow without the assurance of forgiveness from God’s people.

An especially good word comes from the letter of *1 John*:

⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God (1 John 3:19-21).

The expression “our hearts condemn us” corresponds to the accusation of Satan that we are worthless sinners and beyond forgiveness. The Good News is that “God is greater than our hearts,” and He can lift us from the accusation of Satan so that “our hearts do no condemns us,” as we find our confidence with God.

A Parable of Jesus: An Enemy has Done This

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, ²⁵ but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. ²⁷ And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' ²⁸ He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹ But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn'" (Matthew 13:24-30).

God sowed His word into the world in the person of His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. No sooner did Jesus begin to teach and preach than Satan opposed him and accused him, acting through the agency of Second Temple Judaism and its leaders. So many wonderful things began to happen when Jesus first arrived on the scene. People were healed, taught, and forgiven through his ministry. Yet, evil sprang up right alongside these mighty works of God. How can this be? Why does God permit such outrageous assaults on His kingdom, His honor, and His people? The parable helps us with a simple statement: “An enemy has done this.” Though we might like to think that God will always step in and prevent evil from happening in His good creation, the fact is that the world has a complexity to it which is not easily explained by the sheer act of God’s Will.

God wanted a world where love would become the everlasting norm among all of His creatures. For after all, He *is* love (1 John 4:8). In order for authentic love to be possible, there needed to be genuine free will. However, free will posed a risk within God’s universe, for He knew that given the choice to love, his sentient creation might also opt for hatred instead. That is the price of freedom: the possibility that people may well choose to do things which God genuinely does not want in His world. The logical outcome of this arrangement is that God doesn’t always get what He wants in his world — at least not all at once. A process of conflict resulted from the creation of freedom. That conflict has broken out in a war between God and Satan, one which raged mightily during the earthly ministry of Jesus: “An enemy has done this.”

In an effort to rid the world of its untidiness, some in the parable propose the pulling out of the weeds *before the harvest*. The owner of the field counsels wisely: let weeds and grain grow together. So it is with temptation. We might want a world where temptation did not exist, but had God made such a world he would have uprooted freedom along with evil. Better to wait until God’s appointed time when evil can be finally dealt with and righteousness rewarded.

Jesus’ own interpretation of the parable gives us much food for thought.

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed is the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Don't Give the Devil a Chance

...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:22-32).

Elsewhere, I have written at length and in detail about this passage from Ephesians 4 (see "Healthy Building: Ephesians 4:17-32; 5:1-20" in the **Deep Foundations** series of *Background Notes*, April 19/20, 2008). The main focus of this passage is on *humanity* and *community*. Through the risen Christ, God wants to raise up in the world the New Humanity, and He invites each of us to become part of it. Such things as deceitful desires, falsehood, unresolved anger, theft, corrupt speech, bitterness, strife, and slander all belong to the Old Humanity. We are to put off these Old things and to put on New ones, much as we would exchange an old garment for a new one. The Holy Spirit of God is the agent for bringing about this marvelous change, but we run the risk of leaving him out of the picture and even ignoring his work in our lives. That is what Paul means by "grieving" the Spirit in this passage. The Spirit wants to complete the work of New Creation and deliver all of us, safe and sound ("you are sealed"), to God at the end of time.

Plugged right into the middle of this text is an important instruction: "Give no opportunity to the devil." If I might paraphrase this: "Don't give the devil a chance!" Literally, the Greek says, "Do not give the *diabolos* a *topos*." The word *topos* is commonly translated "place," but it can have a range of meanings: "location, region, vicinity, spot, station, position, office, chance, opportunity, passage, sea port." Considering this week's study, we might want to elaborate by saying:

"Don't give Satan room to ply his trade as: deceiver, destroyer, ruler, and accuser. Don't give Satan a straight shot at his targets: our minds, bodies, wills, and consciences. Don't let Satan use his weapons: lies, suffering, pride, and accusation. Don't allow Satan to fulfill his purposes: ignorance of God's will, impatience with God's will, independence of God's will, and indictment of God's will."

Concluding Thoughts

We need to position ourselves so as to make it hard for Satan to work his wickedness against us. "Don't make it easy for him," and God will in the end "make it impossible for him" to force us into temptation's grasp. Along with this determination on our part, should be the petition of the "Our Father:"

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One (Matthew 6:13).

The implication of that request is not that God is looking for ways to tempt us. We have already seen how that is impossible, based on the plain teaching of Scripture. What this text says to us is simply, "Lord, give us what we need so that temptation will not be successful in seducing us into its purpose. And, especially, defeat Satan when he launches his attacks against us."

To that end, we have the confidence communicated in this important passage:

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

What the “Our Father” offers us as a *request* for God’s deliverance, this passage makes as a *promise* based on the faithfulness of God. In the matter of temptation, God will always level the playing field. As with Job, so with us, our heavenly Father places limits on what Satan is allowed to do against us. We are fully aware of how he works: Scripture gives us the plain truth about the Devil. The cross is God’s sign that Satan has truly been defeated (D-Day). The Second Coming of Jesus is the further promise of his final doom (V-Day). The Holy Spirit is the guardian of the people of God, and he is determined to bring them home to Him, safe and sound. And so, Paul’s words to us in this text ring clear: “There is a way of escape. We are able to endure temptation...and win!”

Glory to God! Amen.

Digger Deeper: *Speaking of the Devil: The Devil is in the Details — Just How Does He Work?*
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *Speaking of the Devil: The Devil is in the Details — Just How Does He Work?* carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. How does “a temptation” differ from “a test”? What will God never do? How do we facilitate temptation’s success? (James 1:13-16).
2. What image does Peter use for the Devil in 1 Peter 5:8, and why is it appropriate? In what sense does the Devil try “to devour” us? (see also Psalm 17:12; 17:9-12; 22:13; 35:17).
3. *Who* Satan is (his *character*) determines his strategy in tempting us. Four distinct character traits describe Satan in the Bible. Identify these traits based on the corresponding Scriptures:
 - 1) John 8:44; Revelation 12:9; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 2 John 1:7; Genesis 3: _____.
 - 2) 1 Peter 5:8; Luke 22:31; Revelation 9:11; Job 2:6: _____.
 - 3) John 12:31; John 14:30; 1 Timothy 3:6-7; Proverbs 16:18; 1 John 5:19: _____.
 - 4) Revelation 12:10; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11; Zechariah 3:1-7: _____.
4. Corresponding to each character trait of Satan is a *target* in our lives he wants to hit. Based on the four traits above, read the following passages and identify the targets:
 - 1) Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 4:17-24; Romans 12:2: _____.
 - 2) Job 2:4-8; John 10:10; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Philippians 1:20; Romans 6:12-13; Romans 12:1: _____.
 - 3) Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 15:19-20: _____.
 - 4) Zechariah 3:1-7; Jude 1:16; Mark 3:2; 15:3; Matthew 12:10: _____.
5. Satan uses specific *weapons* as he tempts Christians. For each trait above, discover the weapon:
 - 1) John 8:44; Romans 1:25; Compare Genesis 2:16 and 3:2; Genesis 2:17 and 3:3; 2 Corinthians 11:13-14: _____.
 - 2) Job 2: _____.
 - 3) Matthew 4:8-9; 1 John 2:16; 1 Peter 5:5-6; Proverbs 16:18: _____.
 - 4) Psalm 38:20; 71:13; Daniel 6:24: _____.
6. What *purposes* does Satan have in tempting us — purposes which grow out of his character?
 - 1) Acts 22:14; Ephesians 5:17; Colossians 1:9; Ephesians 6:6: _____.
 - 2) James 5:11; James 1:2-3; Hebrews 6:12; Galatians 5:22-23: _____.
 - 3) Romans 1:25; 2 Chronicles 26:15-16; Deuteronomy 6:10-12: _____.
 - 4) 1 John 3:19-21; 2 Corinthians 2:7-8, 11: _____.
7. According to the parable Jesus told in Matthew 13:24-43, what is God’s attitude toward the persistence of evil (and temptation) in His world? What key statement does the parable make in 13:28?
8. What should be our general approach to Satan’s temptations (Ephesians 4:22-32, especially 4:27)? In what ways do we collude with him in these temptations?
9. Explain the key idea from the “Our Father” found in Matthew 6:13. What does this passage mean? What does it *not* mean?
10. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. Respond to the following claim: “We are powerless against Satan’s overwhelming temptation strategy!”