

## WHO IS THE DEVIL

### John 8:42-44

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. <sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. <sup>44</sup> 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 does not stand in 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.

### MESSAGE:

The idea of the devil is not intellectually fashionable anymore. Even to speak of “the devil” in secular company makes you feel like a yokel from the backwoods where nobody ever heard of passive aggression or social pathology or any of the other terms we use nowadays to explain why people do mean things to each other. To suggest that such things are the work of the devil seems almost embarrassing in a secular age where scientific explanations have replaced religious doctrines as our way of understanding human nature.

One of the reasons the secular mind rejects the notion of a devil is that flies in the face of their confidence that through science man will one day learn how to eliminate all socially dysfunctional behavior and everybody can get along. It asserts that there is something—or someone—in the world that is beyond correction, beyond explanation, beyond elimination and beyond redemption—something beyond our power to fix. We are more comfortable thinking in terms of illness rather than evil because illness implies the possibility of a cure. Criminals are not evil, they're merely sick.

Of course some behaviors are so monstrous that they challenge our attempts to explain them psychologically or medically. Did Adolf Hitler murder six million Jews because of how he was treated as a child? Has Vladimir Putin invaded the Ukraine and committed war crimes because he is paranoid?

There was a time when we would have believed that such people were demon-possessed. But now belief in Satan's existence is diminishing—even among Christians. The Barna Research Group reported that 59% of Christians believe that Satan is only a symbol of “bad things that happen.” Only 35% believe that he is an actual being with plans and purposes.

Many Christians believe that sin is not the result of temptation but of worldly problems. Theft comes from social inequality; violence stems from poverty; sexual crimes come from bad parenting; profanity comes from insects and thorns. The problem with this line of reasoning is that none of those problems existed in the Garden of Eden, yet there was still sin.

From a Biblical point of view, worldly problems are not the cause of sin, but the consequences of sin. They do, however, serve as great excuses for sinning. C. S. Lewis was once asked if he still believed in the devil in modern times. He said, “What the time

of day has to do with it I couldn't say, and I'm not particular about hooves and horns, but as to whether I believe that the devil exists and is hard at work in this world, the answer is yes, I certainly do." Like C. S. Lewis, the Bible is not concerned with what is intellectually fashionable at any given point in time or history. It has a very simple explanation for where sin and evil come from: they are the work of the devil. With that in mind, let's take a look at what Jesus had to say on the subject.

Jesus said the following things about Satan:

- he is the enemy
- he is the evil one
- he is the prince of this world
- he is a liar and the father of lies
- he is a murderer
- he was cast out of heaven
- he has his own kingdom
- evil men are his sons
- he sows weeds among wheat
- he snatches God's word away from those who hear it
- he desired to destroy Peter
- he has demons who follow him
- there is an eternal fire prepared for him

From this list alone, it is fair to say that if one wants to dispense with the idea of the devil, he might as well dispense with Jesus as well for Jesus clearly and repeatedly spoke of him and his work in this world among mankind.

There is, however, also some good news regarding Satan.

- Although he is smart—smarter than any person—he is not omniscient: God's knowledge is vastly superior to Satan's.
- He is not omnipotent: only God is all-powerful
- He is not omnipresent—he can only be in one place at a time.

Putting these three things together we can say that the devil can incite, prompt and manipulate us, but he cannot control us or force us to do anything. We make a big mistake, however, if we don't take him seriously. Though he can only be in one place at a time, he doesn't need to be. He has our sin nature working for him and a legion of demons at his command. He works through seduction, not command, but he is a master at seduction. And there is a large part of us—our sin nature—which is ready and willing to be seduced. Fortunately we have something that can trump all the seductive powers of Satan: we have the Word of God. Of course it won't help us if we don't use it.

Imagine that you are a soldier who has just been deployed to make your way through several miles of enemy territory on foot. The territory you will be crossing is riddled with landmines, any one of which would seriously injure or even kill you. You are given a map that shows exactly where each and every one of the landmines is located. What would you do with that map? Would you leave it behind in your barracks? Would you shove it

in your back pocket and look at it only every now and then? Or would you study it every morning and keep it in front of you every step you took that day?

Well, you are on a spiritual journey through enemy territory and your way is riddled with spiritual landmines. And you have been given a map—the Bible—which tells you the nature and the location of each and every landmine. So what are you doing with your Bible? Are you leaving it on the shelf to collect dust? Is it packed away in the attic? Or are you looking at it every day and taking its instructions to heart?

Your Bible will tell you very clearly how Satan operates and where he has placed his landmines. A perfect example is how he operated in the Garden of Eden to win Adam and Eve over to his side and turn them against God.

**Genesis 3:1-5:** <sup>1</sup> 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<sup>[a]</sup> shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> 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.’” <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

First, the serpent calls God’s word into question. “Did God **really** say...?” Then he misquotes God: God only forbade eating the fruit of one particular tree in the garden. Then, when he had aroused Eve’s interest he flatly contradicts God’s word: “You will not surely die.” Then he calls into question God’s character and motives. Then he arouses her appetite, convincing her that the forbidden fruit is not only pleasing to the eye but also sweet to taste. Then he appeals to her intellectual pride by suggesting that she deserves to know all the things that God knows.

This makes her dissatisfied with the knowledge she does have. Eve had everything in the world to eat and enjoy except one thing, so he convinced her that it was the most desirable thing of all **simply because she was not supposed to have it**. In exactly the same way he convinced David, who had hundred of wives and concubines, that another man’s wife was more desirable than all the rest **simply because he was not supposed to have her**. Finally, he tempted Eve spiritually by putting doubt in her mind. What did she doubt? She doubted God’s clear word, his goodness, his love, his truth, his wisdom and his judgment—all on account of her desire to have what He had withheld from her. Then she polished it all off by leading her husband, Adam, into sin and death along with her. If anything, his was the greater sin because he had received the command from God Himself yet not only refused to honor it but aided and abetted Eve in dishonoring it.

But before we leap to judgment, let’s admit that if it had been us, we would have done the same thing Adam and Eve did. We may have inherited sin from them, but we are equally responsible for it. So what do we do?

James says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Well and good but how do we resist? What form can our resistance take? Do we just say "No" to him? I wager we've all tried that and sometimes it works, but sometimes it doesn't.

So what do we do? Fortunately we have a perfect model of successful resistance in Matthew 4 which describes how Satan tempted Jesus during the 40 days Jesus fasted and prayed in the wilderness before launching his ministry.

First Satan tempts Jesus through physical desire: he has fasted for 40 days and he is hungry. "Since you are the son of God, turn these stones into bread." And how does Jesus respond? He goes immediately to the Scriptures. "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then Satan tempts Jesus to try to use God to glorify himself. He places Jesus on the highest point of the temple and says, "Since you are the son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" And Jesus answers, "It is also written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Finally, the devil tempts him to pride: to desire worldly glory rather than to serve God. He takes him to a high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." And Jesus said, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" And the devil fled from him.

Now consider the contrast between Eve and Jesus. Eve valued her physical appetite more than God's word. Jesus valued God's word more than his physical appetite. Eve trusted Satan's words rather than God's word. Jesus trusted God's word rather than Satan's words. Eve doubted God's love and succumbed to pride and self-glorification. Jesus trusted God's love and rejected pride and self-glorification. Eve yielded to lust of the eye, flesh and spirit; Jesus put God above everything else. The one said, "I want..."; the other said, "It is written."

We can make two mistakes regarding how we think about the devil. We can take him too seriously or we cannot take him seriously enough. If we wish him out of existence, we are not taking him seriously enough. He can operate all the more effectively on us if we blind ourselves to him. On the other hand we can give him more power over us than he really has. We have God on our side, and he does not. We should give the devil his due—no more and no less—and trust God.

So the next time he tempts you just turn to God's word and tell him: "It is written."

Amen.