

KNOWING YOUR ENEMY



FOCUS VERSE

II Corinthians 2:11

Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

LESSON TEXT

John 8:44

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Ephesians 4:27

27 Neither give place to the devil.

Ephesians 6:11

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

James 4:7

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

I Peter 5:8

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.

I John 3:8–10

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

I John 4:4

4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.



FOCUS THOUGHT

The enemy of the soul, humanity's greatest foe, is a liar and the master of deception. For victory, the believer needs to understand the enemy and his tactics.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Winning the Spiritual War through Tactical Superiority

We can overcome our spiritual enemy and thwart his attacks against us, but we can only be victorious over his deceptive strategies if we know him—know how he operates. In other words, we must understand his subtle tactics that we may resist his schemes and gain tactical superiority. As Paul wrote in II Corinthians 2:11, we avoid Satan’s gaining any advantage over us by becoming aware “of his devices.”

In his article titled “How to Confront the Enemy’s Tactics,” John Eckhardt wrote, “We are not to be ignorant of the devil’s tactics. We can overcome all his schemes. . . . or program of action. . . . Warfare involves tactics and strategies. The greatest generals are great tacticians and strategists. You cannot win

without a strategy. Don’t allow the enemy to strategize against you” (www.charismamag.com, accessed February 3, 2015).

Michael Lee Lanning, Lt. Col. (Ret.) US Army, wrote an article titled “The Top Ten Battles of All Time.” In it he stated, “Battles win wars, topple thrones, and redraw borders. Every age of human history has experienced battles that have been instrumental in molding the future. . . . They introduce weapons, tactics, and leaders who dominate future conflicts” (www.historyplace.com, accessed February 3, 2015).

We may not be mighty captains in the spiritual battles of life, but our Commanding General is the Almighty, and through Him we can exercise complete tactical superiority.

OUTLINE

- I. THE ENEMY: DEFEATED AT CALVARY
- II. THE ENEMY: KNOWLEDGE-ABLE AND SLY
- III. THE ENEMY: A LIAR AND DECEIVER
- IV. THE ENEMY: AN ACCUSER AND A SLANDERER
- V. THE ENEMY: A MURDERER
- VI. THE ENEMY: A SELF-APPOINTED JUDGE
- VII. THE ENEMY: JEALOUS
- VIII. THE ENEMY’S END

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Satan is not so concerned with how he accomplishes his goals; he is concerned only that he achieves them. It is to his advantage if we stereotype his methods so we expect him always to behave in the same way. For example, because of some of the frightening

behavior attributed to him or to demons in Scripture as well as throughout history, we may think Satan always acts out similarly. But this is not the case.

Paul described false apostles who transformed themselves “into the apostles of Christ,” thus modeling themselves after Satan, who “is transformed into an angel of light” (II Corinthians 11:13–14). If Satan does this, “it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness” (II Corinthians 11:15).

Today’s Focus Verse is frequently used to remind us to stay on high alert so as to avoid being deceived by Satan.

“Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (II Corinthians 2:11).

In considering the context of this verse, however, it is evident Satan’s deceptive work does not always include the frightening phenomena often associated with his destructive behavior. Here, Paul’s warning was connected

with the importance of forgiveness. If we fail to forgive those who wrong us, we give Satan an advantage over us. Although Paul did not spell out the nature of this advantage, he put it in the category of a “device” Satan uses. Somehow, if we do not forgive, we lose our advantage in spiritual warfare over Satan.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

The Holy Scriptures provide the only reliable guidance for us in our attempt to know our enemy. There is a long history of speculation on what is sometimes called demonology. Some of this reflects valid biblical insight. For example, a brief discussion of demons in the *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* offers this definition: “Derived from the Greek terms *daimōn* and *daimonion*, demons are created spiritual beings who, along with Satan, are in rebellion against the good purposes of God. These ‘unclean spirits’ seek to oppose, afflict and deceive Christians and non-Christians alike and to incite humans to rebel against God and God’s good purposes for human kind and creation.”

But there is a vast realm of biblically baseless superstition posing as valid insight into the nature and behavior of Satan and demons. Some of these superstitions are amusing; others frighten people who have limited knowledge of Scripture. The use of the word *luck* suggests a belief that good or bad things happen as a result of some event or behavior. For instance, some people think it is “bad luck” if a black cat crosses one’s path or “good luck” if a person finds a penny.

The Holy Bible says nothing about luck. Instead, it refers to enmity between God and Satan, enmity that began when Lucifer rebelled against God.

I. THE ENEMY: DEFEATED AT CALVARY

When Satan set out on his rebellious path against God, he embarked on a hopeless venture. From his first disobedient step, he was destined to defeat.

“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken

the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit” (Isaiah 14:12–15).

Ezekiel offered a similar analogy in his funeral song for the human king of Tyre:

“Thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground” (Ezekiel 28:16–17).

The earliest recorded announcement of Satan’s impending defeat was given shortly after his deception of Eve.

“And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:14–15).

Various allusions to Satan’s defeat are found in the New Testament.

“The prince of this world is judged” (John 16:11).

“And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:17–19).

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

By His work on the cross, Christ “having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15). The ultimate outworking of Satan’s defeat will not be seen, however, until the conclusion of the Millennium and the final judgment.

“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

II. THE ENEMY: KNOWLEDGEABLE AND SLY

The first reference to the one known ultimately as “the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan” (Revelation 20:2) described him as “more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made” (Genesis 3:1).

“Apparently the serpent was a very different creature than its cursed descendant we know today. Not only did the curse change its physical form, but its intelligence may have been highly diminished. The word ‘subtil’ can be negatively used to express crafty or sly, or positively it means sensible and prudent. The serpent could have been a highly intelligent creature, cleverer than any other animal” (*Apostolic Study Bible*).

God had given Adam and Eve dominion over all creation, including the serpent that became an instrument of temptation. (See Genesis 1:26–28.) Somehow, Satan was able to appropriate this creature for his purposes.

All trees in the Garden were pleasant to the sight and good for food (Genesis 2:9), but Satan did not arrange to meet Eve at a tree that was only esthetically pleasing and physically nutritious. He arranged to meet her at “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” the one tree that bore the forbidden fruit (Genesis 2:17). Satan did not call to Eve’s attention the beauty of the tree or its ability to satisfy hunger; instead, he assured her that to eat of the tree would result in her receiving

the divine quality of wisdom. Thus, the fall of humans into sin is portrayed not simply as a desire for beauty or health, but as a desire for wisdom and specifically for wisdom God reserved unto Himself.

Although Scripture has much to say about the value and desirability of wisdom (for example, the Book of Proverbs, the prayer for wisdom [James 1:5–8], and the spiritual gift of the “word of wisdom” [1 Corinthians 12:8]), these ideas are not connected with any notion of usurping the place reserved only for God. Before the encounter between Eve and the serpent, only God pronounced what is good and what is not good. The irony here is that human beings were already made in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1:26–27). What more could they have wanted?

Satan’s subtle promise extended what was already their reality only to the degree that they would be “as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). He seemed to have suggested God had withheld from Adam and Eve only one aspect of His divine privilege, the right to determine what is good and what is evil. For Eve, this was the irresistible temptation. Satan discovered and exploited her one vulnerability, the idea that if she ate of this tree, she could be fully like God. She could make life’s most important decisions—determining right and wrong—for herself. She would not need to consult with God.

In his cleverness, this is the temptation Satan holds out to all of us. It was his personal temptation, the desire to be independent of God, and it is the root of temptation for all humankind.

III. THE ENEMY: A LIAR AND DECEIVER

Satan lied to Eve. It will never be a human privilege to usurp God’s place, to make God’s decisions, to determine right and wrong, and to live independently of God. Eve was deceived (1 Timothy 2:14). The nature of her transgression was to think God withheld something good from human beings at creation and that it was somehow wrong for God to instruct people concerning acceptable and forbidden behavior. To be fully human—according to Satan’s lie—was to live a fully self-determined life. But this notion is

a deception. Instead, to be fully human is to live within the parameters established by God. Although this includes avoiding all God has prohibited, it also embraces all He has given us richly to enjoy (I Timothy 6:17).

Satan's stubborn independence from God renders him incapable of speaking the truth. Like all who think God withholds good and who seek fulfillment in isolation from God, Satan lives in the realm of deception. Here is how Jesus said it to those who rejected Him:

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44).

IV. THE ENEMY: AN ACCUSER AND A SLANDERER

Although Revelation 12 has been the subject of a variety of interpretations, there is sufficient clarity in the chapter to allow some unquestionable assumptions. First, Satan has engaged in cosmic warfare against those angels who are loyal to God. Satan and his angels lost this war and were cast out of Heaven (Revelation 12:7–9). Second, Satan's chief weapon is deception (Revelation 12:9). Third, Satan has relentlessly accused people to God. This indicates Satan has delighted in reminding God of the sins of humanity (Revelation 12:10). Perhaps there is here a glimmer of Satan's attempts to justify himself; he is, after all, not the only one to rebel against God. So has every human being. Fourth, those who have been the object of Satan's accusations have overcome him "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Revelation 12:11). This indicates that by Christ's work on the cross and by faith in His work so genuine it resulted in willingness to embrace martyrdom, Satan's accusations were revealed to be baseless. The blood of Jesus dealt with the sin problem once and for all, and faith in Christ is the thing that pleases God. (See I John 1:7–10; 2:1–2; Hebrews 11:6.)

V. THE ENEMY: A MURDERER

To those Jews who sought to kill Jesus but at the same time insisted Abraham was their father, Jesus said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him" (John 8:44). The second sin recorded in Scripture was the sin of murder. Cain murdered his brother Abel, a man of faith. (See Genesis 4:3–11.) It is possible that Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God because it was an act of faith; Cain's was unacceptable because he sought access to and approval from God on the basis of rite or ceremony apart from faith. (See Hebrews 11:4.)

The relevance of the story of Cain and Abel to Jesus' warning that those who rejected Him were of their father, the devil, as opposed to being children of Abraham, is that Abraham is the father of all who believe. For example, Paul wrote, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7). Only those who believe on Jesus are the true children of Abraham. (See Romans 4:16.)

Abel was the prototypical man of faith. The story of the human race from the beginning is the story of the tension between those who believe and those who do not. Those who believe are identified with Abraham; those who do not are identified with Satan, the first to reject faith in God in favor of self-determinism. Eve, Adam, and Cain followed his example. The spirit of self-determinism is the spirit of murder, for it values only that which pleases self.

It is not particularly strange that before much time had elapsed, Cain had killed Abel, because at root in a sinful heart—one that wants its own way—nothing is sacred, not even life.

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (I John 3:14–15).

VI. THE ENEMY: A SELF-APPOINTED JUDGE

Satan's rebellion against God was inherently an intention to set himself up as the judge of all. The declaration "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14) was an announced intent to rule all creation. To rule includes acting as the supreme judge, as implied in the statement "I will exalt my throne." There is, however, only one legitimate throne, the throne of God. There is thus but one true Judge.

"And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne" (Revelation 4:2).

"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works" (Revelation 20:11-13).

Satan's plan to exalt his throne was a plot to usurp the place of the Messiah. In Isaiah's vision, he "saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1). According to John, Isaiah's vision was of the Messiah, Jesus (John 12:41). The throne belongs to Jesus, to whom all judgment is given.

"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22).

VII. THE ENEMY: JEALOUS

From the beginning of his rebellion against God to its ultimate result at the conclusion of the Millennium, Satan's jealousy of God is

evident. At first, he wished to replace God as the supreme authority in the minds of Eve and Adam. If he could convince Eve that God had lied when He warned of the consequence of eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Satan would be seen as the source of truth.

When he is released from the bottomless pit after one thousand years of captivity, Satan will demonstrate he has not recovered from his jealous intent to dethrone God and to set himself up in God's place.

"And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them" (Revelation 20:7-9).

Satan is an incurable rebel. At the root of his rebellion is the desire to usurp God's place, a desire fueled by jealousy.

VIII. THE ENEMY'S END

Satan's decision to seize the place of God was doomed from the beginning. He is a created being, and creation can never become the Creator. Under the symbolism of the kings of Babylon and Tyre, Satan's fate was graphically described.

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground. . . . thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit" (Isaiah 14:12, 15).

"Thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.

... therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee” (Ezekiel 28:16–18).

As Scripture draws to its conclusion, that which has been described in figurative language is stated in concise, literal terms. Satan is finished. His attempt at a coup is over.

“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Although Satan’s fate is sealed, we are still in the era of his ongoing, though hopeless, attempts to frustrate God’s plans. This means we must continually be alert to his efforts to deceive us individually. It is God’s desire that all people be saved, but He has given each of us freedom to make the decisions that will determine our eternal destiny.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,

but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:16–17).

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).

Satan will be unable to defeat God’s grand purposes that are determined solely by God’s unilateral decisions; he is able to thwart only those desires of God that call for individual human response. Specifically, Satan is able to prevent from being saved only those he succeeds in deceiving. Therefore, wisdom calls for awareness of the techniques Satan uses in his deceptive efforts. This includes alertness to the fact that Satan is a liar. Nothing he says is true. Thus we must “give no opportunity to the devil” (Ephesians 4:27, ESV). We must submit to God, which involves resisting the devil. If we do this, he will flee from us. (See James 4:7.) To know that Satan is our adversary calls for sobriety and vigilance. (See I Peter 5:8.) We must not be lighthearted about the possibility of being deceived.

On the other hand, we need not walk in fear. God’s Spirit in us is greater “than he that is in the world” (I John 4:4). ■

REFLECTIONS

- Can you think of specific occasions in your life when Satan has attempted to deceive you? How did you avoid his efforts?
- If you can think of such occasions, what was the nature of Satan’s attempted deception? theological? doctrinal? assurance of salvation? certainty of God’s unconditional love?
- Have you had occasion to interact with someone who had been deceived? Were you able to help that person recover from deception? If so, how were you able to do this?