

#### **4. The Work of Demons**

Today we want to wrap up our discussion of angels and demons by looking at the work of demons. Let's say a word about the present activity or work of demons in the world.

First of all, these demonic creatures blind unbelievers to the truth of the Gospel. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Paul writes:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.

That's a sobering thought, isn't it? When you encounter an unbeliever who resists the Gospel and is not willing to place his faith in Christ, Paul says that Satan has blinded his mind to keep him from seeing the truth of Christ's Gospel. So Satan is responsible for keeping people in unbelief and making them resistant to the message of the Gospel.

In 2 Timothy 2:24-26, speaking of the character which we are to develop as servants of Christ, Paul says,

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Notice that according to this verse unbelievers are already in the snare of Satan. They have already been captured by him to do his

will. He prevents them from believing the Gospel and from knowing the truth. Moreover, their wills are captive to him to carry out his will. So unbelievers are both intellectually and volitionally impaired. The prayer is that, as we show forth a gracious character which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, in evangelizing unbelievers, God may grant them repentance so that they can escape Satan's snare and come to believe the Gospel and so find eternal life.

Second, Satan and these demonic beings seek to nullify the preaching of the Kingdom. In Mark chapter 4 we have the familiar parable of the sower. Notice what Jesus says in verse 15 in interpreting this parable – “And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown; when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word which is sown in them.” Those who are along the path where the seed is sown represent unbelievers who hear the word of the Kingdom. That's what this parable is about. It's a parable of the Kingdom. But Satan comes and snatches away that word so that they cannot respond to it. Thus, Satan seeks to counteract the preaching of the Kingdom of God.

Third, Satan and the demons seek to destroy the servants of God. That is to say, these creatures not only keep unbelievers in their snare, but they are out to destroy you. They hate you intensely. They will do anything that they can within their power to destroy you. Paul had founded a church in Thessalonica and then went on to other cities on his Mediterranean missionary tour. In time he became worried about the fate of those believers that he had left behind at this infant church in Thessalonica. He wrote 1 Thessalonians to them. In 1 Thessalonians 3:5 Paul writes to his Christian converts, “For this reason, when I could bear it no longer,

I sent that I might know your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor would be in vain.”

Here Paul's fear was that Satan the tempter would have tempted the young Thessalonian Christians so that they would have apostatized and all of the apostle's labor would have gone down the drain and been for nothing because they had lapsed in their faith and so had been destroyed by Satan.

Also 2 Corinthians 2:11. Paul says that his forgiving the people in Corinth for their terrible sin was “to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs.” Satan's design was to destroy these Corinthian Christians – to gain the advantage over them, as Paul puts it. But Paul says he is not ignorant of that, and so he is careful to exercise the grace of Christian forgiveness in order to keep them in the faith.

Finally, 1 Timothy 3:6-7, speaking here of the qualifications for being a bishop in the church, Paul says, “He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” This is yet one more example of Satan seeking to undo Christians. He's trying to ensnare them, to capture them and so to bring them into condemnation.

In 2 Corinthians 11:28, Paul speaks of the suffering that he endured as an apostle of Christ. It's interesting that, in addition to all of the physical suffering he endured, he also says besides this there is “my anxiety for all the churches.” Why was Paul so anxious for the churches that he had founded? Well, simply because one of the

activities of Satan and these demonic beings is to destroy God's servants and to render them as ineffective as they possibly can.

Fourth, these demons can possess people. Remember the story we read of the Gadarene demoniac who was indwelt by a legion of these demonic creatures in Mark 5. What was significant about that exorcism is that it said that the demons *came out of* the man and they *entered into* the swine that were feeding in the area. This is an example of demonic possession where the demons actually indwell a person. Also, look at the example of Judas Iscariot in John 13:27. We don't often think of Judas as being demon-possessed, but when you read John 13:27 that seems to be what it indicates. During the Last Supper we read, "Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.'" And Judas went out to betray Christ. So he was apparently demon-possessed at that point. He had given himself over to Satan, and Satan had entered into him.

Other exorcisms performed by Jesus in the gospels should be seen, I think, in this light. For example, in Mark 1:32 we read, "That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons." This would be an example of Jesus' ministry as an exorcist in casting out demons. Luke 9:42 gives another example. This is the story of the epileptic boy that was healed by Jesus. Luke 9:42 says, "While he was coming, the demon tore him and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father." This would be another example of Jesus' ability to exorcise these demons from people who were demon-possessed and thereby to show the inbreaking of God's Kingdom in his ministry.

Fifth, Satan and his demons harass God's servants. If they can't destroy you, if they can't possess you, then they will at least harass you. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul says to the Thessalonians, “we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.” Paul wanted to come and visit the Thessalonians once again to see if they were holding to the faith, but Satan was throwing obstacles in Paul's path preventing him from carrying out the mission that he desired to do.

Also, this kind of harassment can take the form of physical suffering or illness. In 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul speaks of a bodily infirmity from which he suffered and he calls it “a messenger of Satan, sent to harass me.” Specifically here a bodily infirmity was seen as being a way in which Satan was harassing the apostle Paul. 1 Peter 5:8 advises, “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour.” Given this, we should expect difficulties, suffering, adversities, and so forth in this earthly life.

Finally, Satan accuses believers. Revelation 12:10 says,

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 brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

Here the reference is to Satan as the accuser of believers before God, until Satan is finally and decisively vanquished.

Let me wrap up by saying a few words about the Christian response to demons. How should we respond to the devil? Should

we worry about him? Should we be afraid? What should we do? Three points briefly suggest themselves from Scripture.

1. We should submit to God and resist the devil. James 4:7 says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Notice you must first submit yourself to God. You cannot resist demons in your own strength. You need the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. You need, first, to submit yourself to God, and then be resistant. The prime example of this, of course, would be Jesus himself in his temptations by Satan where again and again he resisted Satan's temptation by bringing and opposing to it the truth of God's word in taking a stand on what God's word said and submitting to that.

2. We should watch and pray. Jesus says in Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Because our flesh is weak and because Satan can get at us through the flesh (which, as I say, means that fallen principle within the human nature that is sinful, corrupt, and perverted), we need to be on high alert and constantly praying as we go through the day so that we don't succumb to our weaknesses and fall.

3. We need to clothe ourselves with the full armor of God. In Ephesians 6:11-18 Paul writes,

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may

be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

I think that the overriding point that Paul is making here is that you need to be prepared for spiritual warfare by being involved in spiritual disciplines like prayer, studying the Word of God, developing righteous virtues in your life, and so on and so forth. Dallas Willard has rightly remarked that it's not enough simply to ask yourself in some situation, "What would Jesus do?" because unless we have already developed the character of Jesus we won't be able to do what Jesus would do in that situation. The battle with Satan thus begins long before an encounter actually takes place. It begins with daily walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, praying, reading the Bible, engaging in meaningful worship, sharing the Gospel, and exercising our spiritual gifts in the context of a local community of fellow believers. We need to prepare for battle, to be clothed with the armor of God, so that when we are in a situation of testing we have the ability to do what Jesus would do. Apart from these preparations we will be weak and easily vanquished. Those are some of the scriptural admonitions about how we can be prepared for spiritual warfare.

With that we come to the end of our discussion of the theological locus of the doctrine of creation on which we've been embarked for the last many months. Next time we'll be moving on to a new theme and topic.