

Satan and His Role

Introduction

Satan is real, and the Bible has much to say about him. He continues to be active today, but he is working differently in this dispensation of grace than he did before this age and how he will work after this age. In this study we'll see that Satan is not only God's adversary, but that he is our adversary, too.

Why should we know about Satan? Isn't it more important to focus our attention and understanding on what God has done and is doing for us through our Lord Jesus Christ? Yes, it most definitely is. However, Scripture describes Satan and his activities so that we can differentiate between the truth of God and lies of Satan. Therefore, it is important to know our enemy. A friend described this necessity by saying that in order to be certain that we have a genuine \$1 bill, we need to know what a counterfeit \$1 bill looks like. This study addresses the characteristics of Satan, who is the counterfeit of God, so that we can recognize his activities.

It is up to the reader to compare Satan's attributes with those of God. Studies by the author that address the attributes of God include **Who Do We Worship?** and **Salvation and the Sovereignty of God**. It can't be overemphasized that for a person to be able to understand the things of God, and to understand who Satan is and what he is doing, he or she must be a child of God. In our natural condition we have only one nature—the sin nature—and because of that one nature we can't understand the things of God or live for God (I Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:6-8). In fact, we can't even seek God (Romans 3:10-11). In our natural sinful condition, we are spiritually dead in sin and separated from God (Ephesians 2:1-3). Our deserved outcome is judgment and eternity in hell (Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15). So, how does one become a child of God and alive in Christ?

The gospel (good news) of salvation is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up from the dead (I Corinthians 15:1-4). Everyone who believes this truth of God is immediately adopted by God as His child (Romans 8:14-17), God considers us to be in Christ and that Christ is in us (Romans 8:1, 9-11; I Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 1:27), and we have the promise of eternal life (Romans 6:23; Titus 3:4-7). This salvation from the consequences of our sin is a gift of God—we can't earn it through any amount of good works (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 4:4-5). Furthermore, believing this gospel is based on a personal admission or acknowledgment that we are sinners and need salvation, which is something that is contrary to our prideful way of thinking. **Do you believe that Christ died for your sins?**

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)¹

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

¹ All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB 1996). Words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version* (KJV) or, if in italics, were added by the author for clarification.

Now I [Paul] make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

In Him [Christ], you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own [the purchased] possession, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Who is Satan?

We first learn of Satan as *the serpent* in the garden of Eden when he tempted Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17; 3:1-7). We know that Satan was either in the form of a serpent or was speaking through a serpent because it is confirmed in Revelation 12:9 and Revelation 20:2. So, who was, and is, Satan? This investigation is limited to the word of God, because mankind has developed its own concepts of Satan over the millennia.

Satan is a being created by God. Originally, he was a covering cherub (a guardian angel of God) but became unrighteous and filled with violence (Ezekiel 28:11-19). He wants to be like God or greater than God (Isaiah 14:13-14). We will see that Satan is powerful, but that he is constrained by God and will be eternally vanquished at the end of the first 1,000 years of Christ’s reign on earth (Revelation 20:7-10). Even though his constraints by God and his destiny are written, Satan does not believe what Scripture says about himself because he has one nature—the sin nature. Therefore, he can’t understand the things of God just as we couldn’t before we were saved.

Satan’s sin nature is the nature that every human inherits. In our natural condition we are considered by God to be children of wrath; that is, we are children of Satan (Ephesians 2:1-3). In the instant we believe the gospel of salvation, however, we become children of God and inherit *all* the blessings that are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).² We are sealed by the Holy Spirit and absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God (Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:31-39). Satan doesn’t believe these things, either, and is doing everything in his power to destroy our fellowship in Christ, ruin our testimony of faith, and bring us back into his fold.

Satan goes by many names and descriptive terms in Scripture, including those in the following list. It is likely that there are some names and descriptions that I have missed. The names “Satan” and “devil” are used most often when he is referred to in Scripture.

² Our new nature of Christ is *added* to our old nature. Therefore, we will continue to sin until the day we die or are caught up to meet the Lord at the rapture. See the author’s **Walk Worthy** that examines how God wants us to live according to our new nature rather than according to our old nature.

Satan—Matthew 4:10-11
 The devil—Revelation 20:1-3
 Lucifer/son (star) of the morning—Isaiah 14:12 (KJV)
 The serpent—Genesis 3:1-5, 14-15; Revelation 12:9; 20:2
 The great dragon—Revelation 12:9
 The evil one/wicked one—John 17:15 (NASB);
 II Thessalonians 3:3 (NASB); I John 2:13 (KJV)
 The accuser—Revelation 12:10
 The tempter—Matthew 4:1-3
 The angel of the bottomless pit (abyss)—Revelation 9:11
 An angel of light—II Corinthians 11:14
 The prince (ruler) of the devils (demons)—Matthew 12:24
 The prince (ruler) of this world—John 14:30

The prince of the power of the air—Ephesians 2:2
 The god of this world—II Corinthians 4:3-4
 Belial—II Corinthians 6:15
 Abaddon [*Heb.* destruction]—Revelation 9:11
 Apollyon [*Gr.* destroyer]—Revelation 9:11
 The adversary/enemy—I Timothy 5:14-15;
 I Peter 5:8
 Beelzebub (Beelzebul)—Matthew 12:26-27
 King of Babylon—Isaiah 14:4, 12-17
 King of Tyrus (Tyre)—Ezekiel 28:11-19
 A roaring lion—I Peter 5:8
 A murderer—John 8:44
 A liar and the father of lies—John 8:44

Where is Satan?

Satan and his angels will be cast out of heaven during the time of great tribulation prior to the return of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth (Revelation 12:9-17). Therefore, it appears that his abode is in the heavens now. The Bible speaks of *heaven and the heaven of heavens* [or highest heavens] (Deuteronomy 10:14), the *spiritual wickedness in high* [or heavenly] *places* (Ephesians 6:12), and that Paul ascended to the *third heaven* where he witnessed things that were glorious beyond words (II Corinthians 12:1-4).³ These descriptions and more indicate that the heavenly realm is very complex, where God is at the head but somehow also includes a place for Satan and his angels.⁴

Though his abode is somewhere in the heavens, Satan and his angels (also referred to as *sons of God*) roam the surface of the earth and go back and forth between earth and God's presence in heaven (Job 1:6-12). This indicates that Satan is not omnipresent, which is an attribute of God (Jeremiah 23:23-24).

What are Satan's Attributes and Roles?

Satan has access to God and accuses believers before God (Job 1:6-12; Revelation 12:10). For what purpose? Perhaps it is Satan's attempt to show God how disobedient and sinful we continue to be so that God would turn His back on us and release us back to Satan. What Satan doesn't understand is that when we believe the gospel of salvation, God justifies us and considers us to be righteous in Christ—the once and final payment for the consequences of sin is imputed to us (Romans 3:19-26; 4:23 – 5:1; 5:18-21). God seals us in Christ by the Holy Spirit, and nothing can separate us from His love—not even Satan (Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:31-39).

³ Paul was also caught up into *Paradise* (also referred to as *Abraham's bosom* [Luke 16:22-23; 23:43]), which is a different place than the third heaven; both, however, are in the heavens.

⁴ Scripture indicates that some angels who rebelled against God were cast into hell and are awaiting final judgment (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6). The author is uncertain when this happened and whether these angels differ from Satan's angels.

Satan is the prince of the devils, or ruler of the demons (Matthew 12:24). These demons are also referred to as Satan's *angels* (Matthew 25:41) and the *sons of God* (Job 1:6). These sons of God, or created beings, procreated with human women before *and* after the great flood of Noah's day, which resulted in a mighty race called Nephilim (Genesis 6:1-4). This race included giants (Numbers 13:30-33), and its people may have been the inspiration behind the gods (powerful men and women) of Greek mythology, Egyptian gods, Roman gods, etc. The Bible doesn't say whether these kinds of people are around today, but they don't appear to be. However, some of the gods worshiped by people today have some characteristics of the gods and goddesses of old.⁵

In condemning the Pharisees (religious leaders of Israel), Jesus compared them to Satan who has been a murderer from the beginning, who has no truth in him, and who is *the father of lies* (John 8:42-44). The Pharisees correctly recognized Satan as the ruler of the demons, but falsely accused Jesus of casting out demons in the name of Satan (Matthew 9:32-34). By falsely accusing Jesus, the Pharisees proved that they were who He said they were.

Satan's demons possessed people so that he could carry out his purpose through them. Jesus cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-32; 9:32-34), He gave authority to His disciples to cast out demons (Matthew 10:1; Mark 16:17), and Paul had the power to cast out demons (Acts 16:16-18). The ability or authority to cast out demons passed away with the passing of all the other sign gifts (I Corinthians 13:8-13).⁶ Therefore, people who claim to have the power to cast out demons are making a false claim and are working contrary to the will of God—they are taking the name of God in vain (Matthew 7:21-23).

The Bible doesn't say that people cannot be demon possessed in this dispensation of grace, but it does say that Satan's servants are ministering as servants of righteousness (II Corinthians 11:12-15). This method is far more subtle and deceptive than when it was common knowledge when someone was possessed by a demon, so it is possible that demon possession is not occurring in this dispensation of grace.⁷ Furthermore, the power of Satan is restrained by the Holy Spirit at this time, so he may not have the ability to control people with his demons (II Thessalonians 2:7).

We don't know what Satan looks like. However, he probably doesn't look like a fierce being with a red complexion, horns, and pointed tail who carries a pitchfork. Although he is called *the great dragon* (Revelation 12:9), that is a description of his character and not of his appearance (besides, dragons are merely mythical beasts conjured up by the imagination of man). He was a created angel of God (a cherub) and originally was beautiful; however, because of his utter sinfulness and unrighteousness, God changed his appearance to something that was repulsive (Ezekiel 28:14-19). We must remember, though, that Satan *disguises* himself as an angel of light (II Corinthians 11:14). Because we don't know what he looks like, it is best that we don't try to depict him as a certain appearance.

⁵ The worship or adulation of Mary is very similar to the worship of the goddesses Isis and Diana in ancient times.

⁶ See the author's **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ** that includes an explanation of the passing of sign gifts.

⁷ There are people who act as if they are possessed by a demon. However, our own sin nature is capable of mimicking the actions of a demon.

Does Satan Tempt Believers to Sin?

Satan tempts believers to live according to the flesh and contrary to the will of God. The first example of Satan tempting a child of God is when he successfully tempted Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:1-7). No one can sit in judgment of Eve because no other person besides Christ Himself has been directly and personally tempted by Satan. Not only is Satan a skillful liar, he is the father of lies (John 8:44). How often have we fallen victim to a lie, or lied to someone who ended up sinning because of our lie? Think about it, brethren (Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9).

Satan also tempted Jesus, the Son of God, to respond to his commands and to worship him, and even used Scripture in doing so (Matthew 4:1-11). Because there is no truth in Satan (John 8:44), he was using Scripture for his own personal gain and was taking the name of God in vain. How did Jesus respond? He used Scripture, truthfully and correctly, to respond to and resist Satan.

Although Satan is not personally tempting us to sin (as he did with Eve and Jesus), he is very successfully tempting us indirectly through false doctrine and through people he is using as servants of righteousness (Galatians 1:6-9; 3:1-3; I Timothy 4:1-3; II Corinthians 11:15). Perhaps through Satan's efforts to feed our pride or ignorance through various temptations, even pastors and Bible teachers are blinded to the truth of God's word or misuse it such that those who hear their teaching do not hear the truth or are unwittingly persuaded to believe a lie. These teachers unknowingly become instruments of Satan.

If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited [proud] and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved [corrupt] mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. (I Timothy 6:3-5).

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (II Timothy 4:3-4)

Satan also uses the tools of mankind to turn the truth of God into a lie, and people, including believers, often fall for his lies. Through philosophy, sociology, media, etc., things that God says are sinful are no longer considered to be sinful. For example:

- Lying is considered to be acceptable as long as it doesn't hurt anyone, even though it does.
- Breaking certain laws, such as disobeying traffic laws or cheating on taxes, is considered to be acceptable as long as we don't get caught (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-17).
- Cursing (e.g., using 4-letter words) and telling dirty jokes are considered to be a normal part of our language and our constitutional right to freedom of speech (Ephesians 4:29; 5:3-4).
- Getting drunk or high is considered to be acceptable as long as the person is of legal age and doesn't drive while under the influence (Ephesians 5:15-18).
- Committing sexual sin (fornication, adultery, homosexuality, etc.) is no longer considered to be sinful (Romans 1:26-27; 13:9; I Corinthians 6:9-11, 15-20; Galatians 5:19; I Thessalonians 4:3-4).

Perhaps the biggest lie propagated by Satan is the common belief that nearly everyone will go to heaven when they die. This lie started in the garden of Eden when Satan convinced Eve that she wouldn't die if she disobeyed God's command to not eat the fruit forbidden by Him. Satan's lie is so successful that most people don't believe that their sin condemns them (or that they actually sin at all) and that they need salvation from the consequences of their sin. Instead, people are satisfied in believing that there is good in all of us and that most of us do enough good things to ensure a future in heaven. In other words, Satan has convinced the world that we can earn our way to heaven, and that most people are successful in their efforts. Eulogies, obituaries, books, television shows, and movies continually propagate this lie today, as do most religions and *Christian* denominations.

But what I [Paul] am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds. (II Corinthians 11:12-15)

It is true that we—members of the body of Christ—are tempted to sin by Satan and his servants. We are warned that our struggle is not against flesh and blood (i.e., mere men) but against the spiritual forces of Satan (Ephesians 6:12). A spiritual battle is going on every day, and Satan's attempts to derail us are inexhaustible. However, a few of the things we should remember and take our strength from are as follows:

- God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to handle, because He will provide a way of escape that will enable us to endure it (I Corinthians 10:13).
- God began a good work in us and will complete it (Philippians 1:6).
- Nothing—not even Satan—can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:31-39).
- We have for our use the full armor of God—through His word—to withstand the attacks by Satan (Ephesians 6:10-17).

Therefore, just as Jesus responded to Satan's temptation, we can resist the schemes and attacks of Satan by depending on the word of God. Scripture provides everything we need to know in our service to God (II Timothy 3:16-17).⁸ However, we must be careful to use God's word correctly (II Timothy 2:15) and not misuse it as Satan did and as many people (including brethren) do today.

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. (I Corinthians 10:13)

Does Satan Cause Believers to Sin?

We see through Paul's personal testimony in Romans 7 that it is evident that believers—children of God saved by His grace—sin because we still have the old sin nature (Romans 7:14-25). He shared this immediately after exhorting the Roman brethren (and us) to stop intentionally sinning or let sin take control of us, and to endeavor to live as those who died to sin and were raised with Christ (Romans 6).

⁸ See the author's **Walk Worthy** that describes how God wants us to live today.

Knowing that we have this spiritual battle going on within us, we need to remember that we are forgiven (Colossians 2:13), that we are not condemned by our sin because we are in Christ (Romans 8:1), and that we should consciously desire and try to live in thanksgiving of what Christ accomplished for us at the cross by walking worthy of our salvation (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12; 3:12-17).

Although Scripture verifies that Satan can tempt believers to sin, there is nothing to suggest that he has the power or ability to *cause* us to sin. There are no examples in Scripture that indicate that a child of God sinned because Satan caused him to sin.⁹ We still have the old sin nature that is more than capable to cause us to sin (Galatians 5:16-21). Furthermore, there appears to be no evidence that Satan or his demons can possess (take control of) believers to do his will.¹⁰ This act would separate a believer from God, and we are promised that nothing can separate us from God or His love for us (Romans 8:38-39). At the moment of salvation believers are sealed unto God by the Holy Spirit, and are a purchased possession of God (Ephesians 1:13-14; I Corinthians 6:20).

What about Judas? Satan entered into Judas, so Judas was used as a tool of Satan to betray Jesus in accordance with God's predetermined plan (John 13:21-27). Judas wasn't a child of God. Although he was chosen by Jesus to be one of His disciples, unlike the others he was chosen for dishonorable use and as an instrument of unrighteousness (John 6:70-71; Romans 9:16-21). What he did, and that he would be replaced, was in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (Matthew 27:3-10; Acts 1:15-20; Psalm 109:6-8; Zechariah 11:11-13).

How is Satan Working Today?

This dispensation of grace is also called an evil world or age (Galatians 1:3-4; Ephesians 5:15-16). Satan is working in the children of disobedience, or wrath—unbelievers. This was our condition in the eyes of God before we were saved. Prior to becoming children of God by His grace, we were children of Satan—God considered us to be dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1-3). This fact is incomprehensible to unbelievers because of their blindness to the truth of God. Unfortunately, many brethren don't really believe it either because they feel that they were alive enough to choose God.¹¹

As we have seen, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, and his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Therefore, we are to be on the alert for and avoid false teachers and deceitful workers who distort, misrepresent, and misuse the word of God for personal gain or to cause divisions among the brethren—all in the name of God or of Christ (II Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15; Galatians 1:8-9; Philippians 3:2; I Timothy 4:1-3; 6:3-5; II Timothy 3:1-5; 4:3-4). This subtle, behind the scenes work contrasts with the outward and obvious manner in which Satan operated (e.g., through demon

⁹ Jesus told Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Matthew 16:21-23). I believe this was a figure of speech because Jesus told Peter that he was setting his mind on *man's* interests instead of God's (i.e., he was speaking according to his old sin nature, which is also Satan's nature). There is no indication that Satan had possessed Peter. Later, Peter said that Satan had filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-10). Ananias and his wife Sapphira were false brethren as proven by their sin, and Satan had some control or influence over them.

¹⁰ In II Timothy 2:20-26, Paul encouraged Timothy to correct those in opposition to his teaching with gentleness, so that God might grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth and escape the snare of the devil. I believe Paul was referring to false brethren (unbelievers) within Timothy's church (see also Colossians 4:5-6).

¹¹ See the author's **Salvation and the Sovereignty of God** to see what the Bible says about God's role in how we are saved.

possession) prior to this dispensation of grace and as he will operate (e.g., through demon possession and through his beast and false prophet) after the rapture and during the tribulation period (II Thessalonians 2:8-10; I Peter 5:8).¹²

Satan hindered or thwarted Paul from visiting the Thessalonian believers (I Thessalonians 2:18). How did he do this? Paul doesn't say, but he had the gift of knowledge¹³ during the early part of his ministry and we can believe he understood what he was talking about. Because we don't have the gift of knowledge (it passed away along with the other sign gifts—I Corinthians 13:8-13), it is unlikely that we are able to distinguish between what Satan may be hindering and what we are hindering simply by exercising our sin nature. Therefore, we are not in the position to cast blame or shift responsibility on Satan when something does not go our way or the way we think it should go.

God gave (or allowed?) a messenger of Satan to *buffet* Paul. Apparently, this messenger manifested itself as some kind of ailment—a *thorn in the flesh*—that physically weakened Paul to keep him from exalting himself because of all that God had revealed to him (II Corinthians 12:7-9).¹⁴ Was Paul a special case, or could this happen to us? It is likely that Paul was a special case because there are no more revelations (the word of God is complete—Colossians 1:25-27; Revelation 22:18) and Paul never attributed the physical ailments or illnesses of his coworkers to Satan or messengers from Satan. Therefore, we are not in a position to say that an illness or a death is due to some work of Satan. Because of the sin nature with which we were all born, our bodies grow old, often suffer diseases or cancer, and die—all apart from the direct working of Satan (Romans 8:18-23; II Corinthians 5:1-5).

We are told in Scripture that some believers *turned aside to follow Satan* (I Timothy 5:13-15). How can believers follow Satan? This cannot mean loss of salvation because we are sealed by the Holy Spirit; however, if we are living according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit, are we not following Satan (Galatians 5:16-25)? If we take our minds off of the things of God and follow our own desires, we are opening up ourselves to the temptations of Satan and we will become instruments of unrighteousness (Colossians 3:1-3; Romans 6:12-13).

In some way Satan was used by God to discipline a child of God. A Corinthian believer was *delivered* to Satan by the Apostle Paul *for the destruction of the flesh*¹⁵ because of his openly and unrepentant sinful behavior (I Corinthians 5:1-5). This believer was later sorrowful (repentant) and restored to fellowship with the other Corinthian brethren at Paul's urging (II Corinthians 2:5-11). Neither Satan nor a demon entered into this immoral believer to cause him to sin; on the contrary, Satan was somehow used as a tool of God to convict this person of his sinfulness to the point of repentance. It is not revealed to us how this occurred, but it is possible that God is still using Satan in this manner. However, as there

¹² See the author's **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)** and **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ** about this dispensation of grace and how it fits into God's eternal plan.

¹³ For a time, the apostles had the gift of knowledge that enabled them to know the hearts (the true inner thoughts) of people and to understand the specific will of God in their lives (Matthew 10:11-15; John 20:23; Acts 5:1-10; 13:8-11; 14:8-10). This gift passed away with all the other sign gifts when Israel was fully set aside by God because of their disobedience (see note 12 above).

¹⁴ This was not demon possession because it had nothing to do with causing Paul to sin or controlling him.

¹⁵ Destruction of the flesh was in a spiritual sense—the *flesh* is referring to our sinful nature (Romans 8:5-8). We are to walk according to the Spirit instead of according to the flesh (Galatians 5:16-17).

are no apostles today and no one has the power or authority of an apostle, no one is in a position to deliver someone over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh.

Pastors, because they are spiritual leaders and have a tendency to become proud, are targets of Satan and subject to teaching false doctrine (I Timothy 3:1-7).¹⁶ Paul mentions two men who he delivered over to Satan so that they might learn not to blaspheme God by teaching false doctrine (I Timothy 1:18-20; II Timothy 2:16-18; 4:14-15). It is very possible that these men, Hymenaeus and Alexander, were false brethren (i.e., unsaved) being used by Satan to confuse and weaken the brethren. This is likely the case because Paul mentioned Jannes and Jambres, who opposed Moses, in the same context (II Timothy 3:8-9; see also Acts 13:4-12).¹⁷ Unfortunately, however, they could have been believers who were misusing the word of God for their own purposes (I Timothy 6:3-5; II Timothy 4:3-4). If the latter was the case, then Paul was turning these men over to Satan as he did with the Corinthian believer. Regardless, Satan is involved when false doctrine is being preached because his lies are being propagated through believers and unbelievers, and God takes this very seriously (Galatians 1:6-10; 3:1-3; Ephesians 5:6).

How is Satan Working Against Believers?

Satan is our adversary or enemy, so his focus is on us—the members of the body of Christ (Ephesians 6:11-12, 16). A former pastor of mine once said “Satan doesn’t go to bars to do his work; he goes to church” or something close to that. In other words, the lost already belong to Satan, so he wants to disrupt the ministry of the word of God to bring believers back to himself (which he can’t do) and prevent people from being saved (which, in truth, he can’t do, either). He is often successful, however, in dividing fellowships and tempting us to walk according to the flesh rather than according to the Spirit.

In what ways is he working against us personally? We should ask ourselves this question: “Am I doing anything to give Satan an opportunity to use me somehow for his purpose?” Could we be opening ourselves up to the temptations of Satan and further sinfulness through alcohol or drug abuse, sexual sin (including pornography), anger, proud behavior (including racism and bullying), jealousy, lying, laziness, greed (gambling), etc.? These attributes of our sinful nature are in opposition to God and His Spirit, so they can only serve Satan’s purposes (Galatians 5:16-21).

Consider how Satan may be using Bible-based churches, organizations, and fellowships. No Christian denominations, nor most Christian churches, understand or teach *the mystery* or the gospel of the grace of God as revealed to us through the Apostle Paul—they do not recognize the importance and distinctiveness of his apostleship and message.¹⁸ Instead, brethren are taught to believe and adhere to a mixture of truths and interpretations derived from the Law of Moses, the gospel of the kingdom, and the gospel of grace, and brush aside or explain away the resulting apparent contradictions in doctrine in

¹⁶ All believers are susceptible to the problems of pride because we don’t realize, or we forget, that all the blessings we have from God are by His grace instead of by our own efforts. Pastors are perhaps even more susceptible because of the inner desire to take some measure of credit for their own understanding of Scripture, their perceived spiritual authority over their congregation, and the salvation of those to whom they minister.

¹⁷ It is assumed by many that these men were Pharaoh’s magicians who mimicked the miracles performed through Moses (Exodus 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18), but we can’t be sure because they are not mentioned by name in the Old Testament.

¹⁸ See the author’s **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ** and **The Mystery (God’s Secret Plan)**.

the process. By doing so, the gospel of salvation—the most fundamental aspect of our faith—is misunderstood or not even preached as such (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2:8-9), leaving many people thinking they are saved when they may not be. How many people think they are saved or that they are going to heaven because they belong to a particular church, or were baptized,¹⁹ or *went forward* in a church service, or because they made *a commitment for Christ* without a true understanding and acknowledgement of their lost condition due to their sin and believing that Christ paid the full price for our sins at the cross? Brethren, doctrinal error serves Satan’s purposes.

Besides misunderstanding the gospel of salvation, other Bible doctrines are misunderstood and misused and cause the world to laugh at and blaspheme God. Unbelievers see what is going on among believers (and what is being taught) and respond accordingly, just as Israel’s hypocrisy and sinfulness caused the Gentiles to blaspheme God (Romans 2:17-24). Further examples of false teaching include the following:

- The teaching and effort to fulfill the great commission is prevalent, but it can’t be fulfilled now and should not even be attempted in this dispensation of grace because it is not God’s purpose for us.²⁰
- Trying to moralize our nation by influencing all levels of government to obey God, especially through obedience of the Ten Commandments, is a misguided effort because the *natural man* can’t understand the things of God or obey Him, and because the Law of Moses was nailed to the cross with Christ—it has been taken out of our way because we are no longer under the Law but under grace (Romans 3:19-26; 6:14; Galatians 3:10-14; Colossians 2:13-14).²¹
- The sovereignty of God is minimized or even preached against by brethren because it defies our human logic—we just can’t accept that God actually is in control and working everything out according to His will. Instead, we apply our human skills to try to fulfill God’s will (or what we think His will is) and subsequently take the credit for doing so.²²
- Propagating the *Kings James Version only* position is very divisive. The KJV is a wonderful version and *might* be the most accurate, but it is not perfect.²³ As with all versions, there are incorrect words or phrases due to translation errors, misunderstanding of context by the translators, and influences by traditional church teaching.
- The doctrines of *creationism* and *flood geology* are propagated without an understanding of what Scripture actually says about creation (it doesn’t say anything about flood geology).²⁴ The way these *doctrines* are presented shows the misunderstanding of those who teach and believe them, and definitely cause the world to blaspheme God.

¹⁹ See the author’s **Should We Be Baptized?** for a discussion on the types and purposes of baptism in the Bible.

²⁰ See the author’s **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ** for an explanation of why we are not to try to fulfill the great commission.

²¹ See the author’s **Governing Authority** that addresses this subject.

²² See the author’s **Salvation and the Sovereignty of God**.

²³ I use several Bible versions during my studies and have found the KJV and NASB to have the fewest errors. Both are excellent translations upon which I depend, and immensely useful concordances have been developed for both of them.

²⁴ See the author’s **Creation—What Does Scripture Say?** to learn about the author’s Scripture-based evaluation of this subject.

Brethren, these and other subjects are false teaching and vain speculations that lead to ungodliness and division among the brethren—they are eagerly used by Satan against us (I Timothy 1:3-7; 6:20-21; II Timothy 2:16-17, 23; 4:3-4; Colossians 2:8). Perhaps the primary underlying sin of all these problems is pride, and Satan can accomplish much destruction through our pride (Proverbs 16:18; I Timothy 3:6).

For through the grace given to me [Paul] I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. (Romans 12:3)

How Should We Deal with Satan?

God didn't leave it up to us to figure out how to deal with, or stand up to, Satan. Please consider the following (incomplete) list of actions and their associated references to see what God wants us to do.

- Know the word of God, rightly divided (i.e., we need to handle it accurately, understanding what is written to whom), and live by it (II Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17).
- Put on the full armor of God in order to resist the schemes of Satan. This armor only comes through the knowledge and correct application of the word of God (Ephesians 6:10-20).
- Walk wisely, making the most of our time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15-16).
- Yield ourselves to righteousness instead of unrighteousness (Romans 6:11-13).
- Speak the truth and be slow to anger so as not to give Satan an opportunity to use us for his purpose (Ephesians 4:25-27).
- Flee, or separate ourselves, from evil and sinful behavior; instead, we should pursue righteousness (I Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; 15:33-34; Colossians 3:5-10; I Timothy 6:10-11; II Timothy 2:21-22).
- Walk worthy of our calling as children of God (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12; I Corinthians 15:56-58).
- Set our minds on honorable things—on the things of God (Philippians 4:8-9; Colossians 3:1-2).
- Depend on God and not on ourselves (Ephesians 3:14-21; Philippians 4:13; II Timothy 4:17-18).
- Acknowledge/admit our sinful condition and remember our position in Christ (Romans 5:8-11; 7:18, 25; 8:1; Ephesians 2:4-6).
- Do all things for the Lord rather than for men (Colossians 3:17, 23).
- Be anxious for nothing; take everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6-7).
- Trust in God and His faithfulness, because He will not let us be tempted beyond what we are able to endure (I Corinthians 10:12-13).
- Remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:31-39).

What is Satan's Outcome?

As mentioned earlier, Satan's future is revealed to us in Scripture. He doesn't understand this because he can't understand the word of God or the things of God. Therefore, he will continue to operate under the assumption that he will win—that he will accomplish his desires. However, his end will be exactly as prophesied in Scripture; that is, exactly how God has already planned it. So, what does Scripture say?

- Satan and his angels will be cast out of heaven and down to the earth to lead the rebellion against God during the great tribulation (Revelation 12:7-17).
- After Christ and His heavenly host are victorious over Satan and his nations, Satan will be cast into the bottomless pit (abyss) prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom (Revelation 20:1-3).
- Satan will be released from the pit after 1,000 years and will gather the nations to war against Christ and His kingdom. He will be defeated by the fire of God and will be cast into the lake of fire for eternity (Revelation 20:7-10).

Summary

Each individual is either a child of God or a child of Satan. If a person believes that Christ died for his sins, was buried, and rose again (the gospel of salvation), he is saved by the grace of God from the consequences of his sin and is sealed unto God for eternity by the Holy Spirit—he is a child of God. However, Satan is our adversary and is doing everything in his power to ruin our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ (and, consequently, ruin our lives) and hinder the gospel of the grace of God.

Satan is powerful, but his power is limited. Although Satan can tempt believers to sin, he cannot enter into us to do his work or cause us to sin. Nothing, not even Satan or his angels, can separate us from the love of God. We must depend on the strength of God, however, through the knowledge and application of His word, to resist the temptations of Satan and to walk worthy of our salvation.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling [rightly dividing] the word of truth. (II Timothy 2:15)

Therefore I [Paul], the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called [our salvation], with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength [power] of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist [withstand] in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:10-17)

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