

# **Christian Ministry Unit 1**

## **Introduction to Theology**

### **Week 7 – Satanology Part 1**

#### **Introduction**

C. S. Lewis wisely said that there are two opposite but equally dangerous mistakes we may make about Satan. One is to disbelieve in his existence and/or under-estimate his power; the other is to over-estimate his power and/or focus on him.

Which mistake do you tend to make?

Which mistake do the people in your home group tend to make?

“Satanology” is the biblical study of Satan and demons. Christian workers need a biblically informed understanding of Satan and spiritual warfare in order to be effective in our ministries. We will spend two weeks surveying this subject.

#### **Satan’s existence**

The biblical testimony for the literal existence of Satan and demons is extensive. While belief in Satan is not necessary for salvation, it is very important for spiritual growth and ministry effectiveness. It is very dangerous to be in the midst of a war and not even know that it is going on! Likewise, we stand to suffer greatly if we do not understand the reality of Satan and his efforts to attack us (1 Pet. 5:8,9; Eph. 6:12).

The Old Testament mentions Satan and demons less frequently than the New Testament, but its testimony is clear and consistent. References in the Old Testament include:

- Gen. 3 – The Serpent (see Rev. 12:9) slandered God and tempted Adam and Eve.
- Job 1,2 – Satan slandered God and accused Job.
- Deut. 32:17 – God rebukes Israel for worshipping idols, which is actually sacrificing to demons.
- 1 Chron. 21:1 – Satan incited David to number Israel (i.e., to trust in his military power instead of trusting in God).
- Zech. 3:1,2 – Satan accused Joshua the high priest before God.

Almost every New Testament book contains references to Satan and demons.

- In the gospels, Jesus clearly speaks of Satan as a real person who is his main enemy. See for example Lk. 4:2-13 (and parallels); Mk. 5:2-19 (and other exorcisms); Jn. 8:44.
- Acts makes several references to Satan and his demons as the real foe of the church (Acts 13:10; 16:16-18; 19:12-20).
- Every author of the New Testament letters makes extensive reference to Satan.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Eph. 1:21 and Col. 2:15 (Paul); Heb. 2:14; Jas. 2:19 (James); 1 Pet. 5:8 (Peter); 1 Jn. 3:8 (John); Jude 1:9 (Jude).

- Revelation makes extensive references to Satan (e.g., Rev. 12), and narrates his ultimate defeat in great detail (Rev. 19,20).

Personal experience is a secondary line of evidence for Satan's experience. Some people in Western cultures experience the reality of supernatural evil before becoming Christians. But any Christian who seeks to serve God will begin to experience Satan's attacks. Can you relate to any of these common attacks?

- The distracting opportunities that relentlessly come our way at points of key spiritual decision.
- The ominous sense of dread often experienced before engaging in ministry.
- The incredible havoc brought into other's lives and into the church during episodes of sin.

NOTE: As we discuss Satan's tactics over the next two weeks, you may find your eyes opened to the many attacks of the enemy you have experienced. Sharing these experiences can be helpful to younger Christians as they learn about spiritual warfare.

## Satan's origin & fall

The Bible gives us little information about Satan's origin and fall, because it focuses primarily on his ultimate defeat and how to overcome him until then. The information it does provide on this subject harmonizes with other biblical teaching.

Ezekiel 28 supplies important information about the origin and fall of Satan. While God laments the fall of the *human* ruler ("leader") of Tyre in 28:1-10, he speaks of the fall of the *spiritual* ruler ("king") of Tyre in 28:11-19\*\*.<sup>2</sup> What God reveals here fits in with other biblical teaching about Satan:

- He was created by God (28:15). He is a creature who is inferior to God, so there is no dualism (1 Jn. 4:4).
- He was the highest created being (28:14 – "the anointed cherub"), superior to other angels (Jude 1:9) and humans in intellect, authority, etc.
- He was originally perfect (28:12,15a), which we would expect if God created him.
- He became evil by exercising his free choice to rebel against God (28:16) because of his pride (1 Tim. 3:6).
- He was cast from God's presence because of his rebellion (28:16; Rev. 12:4,9).

Additional biographical information about Satan:

- He evidently persuaded one-third of the angels to join him in his rebellion against God (Rev. 12:4,9).

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<sup>2</sup> The Tyrians called Melqart the "king of the city." Baal-Melqart was Tyre's primary god. See *The New Bible Dictionary*, p. 109, and *The New Bible Commentary*, p. 678. The Bible regards Satan as the spirit behind all idols (1 Cor. 10:19,20), and some demonic rulers are identified with human nations (Dan. 10:13,20).

- He then led the first humans into his rebellion (Gen. 3), after which their dominion over the earth was forfeited to him (this will be an important point to recall in future weeks).
- He seeks, through a variety of tactics, to prevent people from being reconciled to God (Matt. 13:49; 2 Cor. 4:4), and to neutralize believers from being effective for Christ (Eph. 6:11).
- He was substantially defeated at the cross (Col. 2:15) and will be completely and permanently defeated at the return of Christ (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

## Introduction to spiritual warfare

The Bible emphasizes that Christians are in a battle, not against human beings, but against Satan and his demons.

God emphasizes three attitudes that are crucial to effective spiritual warfare:

- **Confidence** – God has already delivered Christians from Satan’s authority, he will ultimately defeat Satan, and through the gospel God has given us all the resources we to overcome him. Therefore, we should focus on God’s provision and not become fearful of what Satan can do to us.

1 Jn. 4:4\* emphasizes that our God is greater than Satan.

Eph. 6:10-18\*\* emphasizes being strong in the Lord and appropriating the gospel as we battle against Satan.

- **Alertness** – Even though we battle an enemy that is doomed to defeat, he can do real damage to us and to God’s cause if we do not stay alert. Because Satan’s main tactic is deception (Jn. 8:44), we must especially be alert for his lies and ready to refute them with God’s truth.

1 Pet. 5:8\* emphasizes being sober and alert because of the real danger of Satan’s attacks. The previous context (5:6,7) implies that a prideful attitude plays into Satan’s hand.

Eph. 6:18 emphasizes that alertness involves prayer.

- **Militance** – Satan will try to intimidate us so that we cave in on our faith and give up on our spiritual responsibilities. God calls us to resist him aggressively with his truth and take steps of faith to obey God.

2 Cor. 10:3-5 emphasizes that we should use our weapons (God’s Word and prayer) to destroy Satan’s lies.

Rev. 12:11\* says that overcoming Satan involves the willingness to lay down our lives.

DISCUSS: Which of these attitudes do you tend to lack?

God has exposed Satan’s main tactics, and he expects us to know what they are and how to combat them (2 Cor. 2:11). Satan’s tactics can be divided into two categories:

- **OVERT** – The Gospels and Acts narrates dramatic displays of satanic presence and power (e.g., demon possession). Christian workers should be able to resist overt attacks on themselves and help others who want to be delivered from them.
- **COVERT** – The Epistles emphasize Satan’s subtle schemes (Eph. 4:11). Like guerilla warfare, Satan normally prefers to work undercover. Christian workers should be able to discern and resist these attacks on themselves and help others who are being attacked. Can you say with Paul: “I am not ignorant of Satan’s schemes?”

## Covert tactics

The goal of the next two weeks is to familiarize you with the main covert tactics discussed in the Bible. We want you to get the **BIG PICTURE** and think about how you see these operating in your life and in others.

**DECEPTION:** Satan is the father of lies (Jn. 8:44), so all of his tactics involve some kind of deception. But here we speak specifically of his creation of religious or philosophical systems which contain some truth, but include spiritually fatal lies.

- **COMMON AVENUES:**

*False religions and philosophies* (Col. 2:8) – Systems which reject Jesus completely (e.g., atheism) or marginalize him (e.g., Hinduism). We see this used most actively against non-Christians, to prevent them from seriously considering the gospel.

*Heresy and false teachers* (2 Cor. 11:13-15) – Sects or teachers who claim allegiance to Jesus, but change essential biblical doctrines. These are most common among new Christians who have limited access to sound Bible teaching (New Testament letters; Jesus Movement cults; rapidly growing mission fields).

*Doctrinal tangents* (Heb. 13:9; 1 Tim. 1:4,5) – Imbalanced teachings which emphasize some biblical subject over the gospel and a lifestyle of love (e.g., speaking in tongues; end-times speculation). Grounded Christians often become vulnerable to these because they counterfeit the healthy excitement that comes from advancing the gospel and loving people. Other workers may rightfully resist these tangents, but over-react against them to create an opposite imbalance.

*Anti-Christian cultural pressure* – Cultural ideologies and/or values which gradually infiltrate evangelical churches and seriously weaken their effectiveness in advancing the gospel (e.g., moral relativism; postmodern hermeneutics; child-centered parenting; victim-centered counseling).

- **COUNTER-MEASURES**

*Stay in the Bible!* The best way to detect a counterfeit is to be an expert on the authentic. No amount of Bible teaching can replace reading the scriptures on your own. Luther said, “The common peasant with the Bible in his own language is a better theologian than the pope”—but he was assuming that the

peasant regularly devoured his Bible! This is why we emphasize personal Bible reading and inductive study.

*Stay focused on “sound doctrine” (2 Tim. 1:13,14).* We must not only teach what the Bible teaches; we must also emphasize what the Bible emphasizes.

“Sound” (hygienic) doctrine focuses on sin as our main problem, God’s grace through Jesus’ atonement as the main solution, and sacrificial love as the main response to God’s grace. Sound doctrine relates other doctrinal and ethical teaching to these emphases. This focus will guard you against imbalance as well as heresy.

*Develop the ability to think critically from a biblical perspective (Heb. 5:14).* You can have biblical knowledge and still be deceived if you don’t develop this. As you interact with the “messages” coming at you (e.g., college lectures and textbooks; movies and TV shows; “Christian” counseling materials; etc.), don’t be a passive receiver! Actively identify the presuppositions and values, and compare them to what the Bible teaches. In a healthy Christian community, members prize this kind of discernment and help one another develop it.

*Be open to corrective input from other Christians (Heb. 3:13; Gal. 2:11-14; Acts 15).* If even apostles needed correction from time to time, how much more do we! Some are more gifted in discernment, others are more mature—so take advantage of their contribution. Elders have a special responsibility to discern doctrinal error and protect the church through exposing it (Titus 1:9). But because any church can engage in “group-think,” we should also seek this input from quality Christian conferences, books, teachers, etc.

**DOUBT:** Satan seeks to erode a Christian’s confidence in God and his Word, because this makes us less effective as workers and more vulnerable to other schemes.

- **COMMON AVENUES:**

*External authorities:* Secular authorities (e.g., college professors) or spiritual authorities (e.g., popular theologians) may mock those who take biblical Christianity seriously. You will be especially vulnerable if you crave their approval or the approval of those who look up to these authorities.

*Internal, existential doubts:* Some are more temperamentally inclined to this. Such doubts often emerge during periods of trial (e.g., ministry failure; dark night of the soul; personal tragedy).

- **COUNTER-MEASURES:** Doubt is not unbelief; it is faith under fire. It is not a sin to have doubts; it is how you *respond* to doubts when they emerge that matters.

*Share your doubts with other Christians!* Doubt, like sin, thrives in the darkness—but it shrivels in the light. Sharing diffuses the accusation that no other Christians wrestle with doubt. They can pray with you, and often provide answers to your doubts.

*Check your personal walk.* Lack of spiritual feeding and ministry will rob us of subjective personal assurance and make us more vulnerable to doubt. Willful rejection of God’s moral discipline results in cognitive dissonance

(contradiction between what you say you believe and how you live), which creates doubt unless we repent.

*Study biblical passages where God's people express their doubts.*

Job, Lamentations, many psalms, etc. are very helpful. The fact that others (including biblical authors!) have had similar doubts is encouraging. The fact that they eventually resolved their doubts is also encouraging and sometimes instructive.

*Expose yourself to answers regarding theological/philosophical doubts.* You are not the first one to ever have this kind of doubt!<sup>3</sup> One of the main values of apologetics is to strengthen Christians against doubt. Many suffer needlessly from doubt because they are too lazy to do this work.

SEDUCTION: SEDUCTION: (*kosmos*)

The Bible states that Satan is the author of a “world system” (1 Jn. 5:19; Eph. 2:2) – a *satanically-inspired system of values that is designed to distract non-Christians from seeing their need for the gospel* (2 Cor. 4:4) and to steal Christians’ affections from Jesus (Jas. 4:4).

- COMMON AVENUES: 1 Jn. 2:15,16\* distills the essence of the world-system into three idolatrous values which can take many forms:

“The lust of the flesh” (Hedonism) - There is nothing wrong with physical pleasure in itself; God gave us bodies with the capacity for enjoying pleasure. But this is the inordinate desire for physical pleasure that leads us to violate God’s will. It includes not only obvious things like drug and alcohol abuse, sexual impurity and perversion, etc.—but also comfort (e.g., indolence as a higher priority than serving Christ; gluttony).

“The lust of the eyes” (Materialism) – There is nothing wrong with owning and even enjoying material objects as gifts from God. But this is the inordinate desire for material possessions and wealth that leads us to violate God’s moral will. Materialism is a crucial part of the American dream (“PERSONAL PEACE & AFFLUENCE”), and it tempts us regardless of our socio-economic status. We find ourselves consumed with thoughts of wanting more rather than being content with and thankful for what we have, and considering how we can use our resources to serve others. For some, materialism is primarily a means of pursuing pleasure and security (see “the lust of the flesh” above). For others, it is primarily a means of deriving identity by competing with other people (see “the boastful pride of life” below).

“The boastful pride of life” (Egotism) - There is nothing wrong with having a healthy sense of self—knowing that you are a significant person who can accomplish valuable goals, impact others, etc. But Satan twists this into an inordinate desire to be better than other people that leads us to violate God’s moral will. As Christians we are significant because of what God has given

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<sup>3</sup> Helpful books include *Doubt* (Os Guinness), *Disappointment with God* (Phillip Yancy), and *True Spirituality* (Francis Schaeffer).

us—forgiveness, adoption, spiritual gifts, etc. The *kosmos* tempts us derive our identity and significance from human praise and approval for our accomplishments. These accomplishments may be very secular (e.g., gang violence; sexual conquest; academic snobbery), or pseudo-spiritual (e.g. all forms of self-righteousness, including competitive ministry, denominational snobbery, etc.). “The boastful pride of life” not only urges us to seek human approval; it also threatens us with human censure if we authentically serve God.

NOTE: Because only God and his ways can fulfill us, the “law of diminishing returns” operates in all three of these areas! We need more and more of the same lust to get the identity, security, or significance that we seek. In this way, Satan enslaves us unless we make a clean break from these lies and embrace Jesus and his path for us.

NOTE: Satan is extremely subtle and creative in how he tempts us through the *kosmos*. He will use different lusts and different forms of these lusts in different stages of our lives to keep us running like rats in a maze. We will be hopelessly enmeshed and enslaved apart from devotion to Jesus.

- COUNTER-MEASURES:

*Do not withdraw from non-Christians or secular culture (Jn. 17:15; 1 Cor. 5:9,10).* This response doesn't really protect anyone from *kosmos*, since its values flourish in religious cultures. More importantly, it betrays our mission to reach the lost.

*Reject the kosmos on an ideological level (1 Jn. 2:17; 2 Pet. 2:18,19).* Through the revelation of scripture, we need to realize and affirm before God that it is ultimately unfulfilling, temporary, and dehumanizing.

*Ask God to reveal the current ways you are being tempted by the kosmos (Ps. 139:23,24).* Are you substantially free from temptation to sexual impurity, but becoming addicted to a culturally acceptable hobby? Are you substantially free from boasting about your career accomplishments, but eaten up with jealousy over the praise other Christian workers receive?

*Repent if God convicts you that you have compromised with the kosmos (Jas. 4:4-10).* This is spiritual adultery—“sleeping with the enemy”—and requires a radical change of heart and direction. Tell God you want to return to him and break from your idolatry. Ask God what he wants you to do, agreeing in advance that you will obey him. He may call for a career change, a budget overhaul with consultation, a break with a certain group of friends, an end to a certain hobby, etc. Such sacrifices are nothing compared to being renewed in God's grace, which will restore your spiritual vitality and lead you forward.

*Actively pursue spiritual growth and ministry (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22).* The best defense is a good offense—unless we pursue God's way of life, we will be drawn back into the *kosmos*. Conversely, when we stay nourished in God's Word, prayer and Christian fellowship, we will be resistant to its appeal. As we learn to thrive off of loving others by reaching out to lost people and

building up our brothers and sisters (through loving one another, personal discipleship, using our spiritual gifts, etc.), we will experience joy and fulfillment that exposes the hollowness of the *kosmos*.

PERSECUTION: Satan influences other people to attack Christians (individually and corporately) in order to intimidate them into backing off from radical commitment to Christ (especially evangelism).

- COMMON AVENUES:

*Secular society* (Rev. 2:10): This can include bad press, community rumors, members threatened, mocking and/or mistreatment on the job, etc.

*Religious community* (Jesus and apostles with Jewish leaders): Christians are commonly persecuted in many nations in which other religions predominate.

*Family and friends* (Matt. 10:21)

- COUNTER-MEASURES:

*Make sure you aren't guilty of wrongdoing* (1 Pet. 4:15)! Beware of the immature tendency to cry “Persecution!” when you are only receiving the consequences for your poor choices. If you are guilty, clean it up and apologize! Only when we have done this can we expect the Lord's protection; otherwise, we are under God's discipline.

*Don't be surprised* (1 Pet. 4:12; Jn. 15:18-20; 2 Tim. 3:12). Because Satan is the ruler of the world, we can expect persecution. The majority of Christians have always suffered persecution. The relative absence of persecution for American Christians is the exception, not the rule—and this situation may well change for the worse. Chronic lack of persecution often means the church is anemic and no threat to Satan (Lk. 6:26).

*Rejoice, because it is a privilege to suffer for Christ and this is the proof that you are being effective* (Phil. 1:29; 1 Pet. 4:14). Bombers get lots of anti-aircraft fire when they are flying over strategically important targets. Likewise, persecution usually signals that we are inflicting enough damage on the enemy that he feels it necessary to mount a counterattack.

*Pray and determine to continue serving Christ (especially evangelism) no matter what the cost* (Acts 4:19,20; 5:40-42; Rev. 12:11). Peter and John led the early Christians to pray, affirming God's sovereignty and asking him for boldness in witness (Acts 4:23-31).

*Stand with other Christians who are undergoing persecution* (Heb. 13:3; Matt. 25:35,36; 1 Pet. 5:9 in contrast to 2 Tim. 4:16ff.). Several reputable organizations provide information about the persecuted church so that you can pray intelligently and help in other practical ways.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on current persecution of Christians, see “Voice of the Martyrs (<http://www.persecution.com/>) and “Open Doors (<http://www.opendoorsusa.org/>).

OPPOSITION: Satan initiates specific actions (besides persecution) designed to hinder Christian ministry.

- AVENUES:

*Circumstantial barriers* (1 Thess. 2:18): Examples include car breakdowns on the way to minister, circumstances preventing new people from coming, distractions when preparing to teach (e.g., fight with spouse), etc.

*Human agents* (2 Tim. 2:25,26; See agents in Acts, including Simon Magus [8], Elymas [13], fortune-teller [16]): Examples include disrupters at meetings, new attendees who seduce others, etc.

- COUNTERMEASURES:

*For circumstantial barriers:* We can't eliminate opposition, but we can anticipate and eliminate them where possible. Educate people to expect them and how to overcome. Pray for protection.

*For human agents:* We should pray to be delivered from them (2 Thess. 3:2). We should also confront them (2 Tim. 2:25,26) and remove them if necessary (1 Tim. 1:20).

## Memory Verses

Ezek. 28:11-19\*\* - Satan's origin and fall

1 Pet. 5:8\* – Be on the alert for Satan's attacks!

Eph. 6:10-18\*\* - Our real battle is against the schemes of Satan. Our primary armor and weapons are our position in Christ, the Word and prayer.

1 Jn. 2:15,16\* - Loving the *kosmos* is antithetical to loving God. The key components of the *kosmos* are the lust of the flesh (HEDONISM), the lust of the eye (MATERIALISM), and the boastful pride of life (EGOTISM).

## Homework Assignment