

Our Limited Foe

It is exciting to see new believers in Christ who have trusted Him, or those who have rededicated their lives to Christ. It is encouraging to note those who have renewed their devotional lives, and who are growing in the marks of Christian maturity. Every godly minister, pastor, and church leader yearns for such things.

There is one, however, who doesn't like to see growing Christians. The Christian does have an Enemy who doesn't like our spiritual progress. That Enemy, Satan, wants to hinder or reverse our journey to higher ground. He is an adversary who would like nothing better to see us fall from our profession of faith in Christ. He is determined to obstruct every positive, upward work of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Many through the ages have denied the existence of a real devil. Yet the Bible speaks of Satan again and again. Seven books of the Old Testament, and every New Testament writer, refer to him. The Lord Jesus Himself spoke of the reality of the devil, and had a number of encounters with either Satan himself, Satan's minions, or his works. To ignore Satan's reality seems to be a deliberate neglect of the Bible's teaching. Millard Erickson writes, "It is clear from the Bible that a serious and intense struggle is going between, on the one side, Christ and His followers, and, on the other, Satan and his forces" (*Christian Theology*, p. 450)

On the other hand, a morbid fascination with the prince of darkness is out of order for the Christian. We must remember that true believers need not fear him or his associates. He is a defeated foe. He can do nothing that God does not expressly allow. He can be resisted, and will flee from us (James 4:7), when we are operating in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament speaks much more of living in a consistently godly manner as a means of confronting evil, than it does of actively seeking encounters with the world of darkened spirits. We are not told to seek out the Enemy, for the Enemy will find us soon enough if we are living out our faith. Erickson reminds us that, "Satan, the great deceiver, may be encouraging interest in demon possession in hopes that Christians will become careless about other more subtle forms of influence by the powers of evil." It is good to be reminded that Satan and his kingdom are real, but what a glorious thought that the Devil is under the dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ!

We are also comforted that we are not alone in our spiritual battles. Every Christian has the same foe. We are in the struggle against him, and against spiritual powers who are opposing the expansion of the Kingdom of Christ. Warren Wiersbe has written, "We are wasting our time fighting people when we ought to be fighting the Devil who seeks to control people and make them oppose the work of God."

We have great resources in the struggle. We cannot handle the enemy ourselves. We need God's strength and grace. We have the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (that is, God Himself) in each believer. Ephesians 6:10-18 exhorts us to pray, to study and use the Word of God (the Sword of the Spirit), to trust in the shed blood of Christ, and to recall the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We need to make use of these resources and keep on growing in Christ. 1 Corinthians 16:13 says, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong."

There will come a time when the devil will have his last hurrah. He will try his utmost to deprive Christ of ultimate victory. However, Satan will be swept away. When Christ returns in glory, "The devil, who deceived them, [will be] cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10). Satan is a created being, and must account to his Creator. God may use the devil as a pruning tool of His kingdom. Aptly put, "Satan is God's lackey." We may not understand the whole picture, but God is God and always will be God—even over the devil (Revelation 11:15).

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