



A Biblical and Reformed perspective on demonology

1. Introduction: Two extremes

In the introduction to his classic *Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis wrote (1942):

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

This timeless caution is particularly true when you follow the literature and theological debates on Satan and Demons and critically weigh contemporary missions and ministry practices.

While our need is to dwell on the riches of Christ rather than on Satan and his demons, we do need to know the biblical teaching of who and what he is. As a major area of God's revelation, the study of Satan teaches us about his character, purposes and his schemes, so that we will be enabled to stand firm in the wrestle against the rulers and the cosmic powers over this present darkness and the spiritual forces of evil.

I have been richly blessed by the 17th century Puritan, Tomas Brookes in his book: *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*.

He is right when he says:

Christ, the Scripture, our own hearts, and Satan's devices, are the four prime things that should be first and most studied and searched. If any cast off the study of these, they cannot be safe here, nor happy hereafter. It is my work as a Christian, but much more as I am a watchman, to do my best to discover . . . the fullness of Christ, the emptiness of the creature, and the snares of the great deceiver.

It is indeed true that many people are ignorant of the nature and schemes of Satan and therefore, they become sitting ducks for his attacks. Some, on the other hand go way beyond the teaching of Scripture and find a demon behind every problem they face.

In his sincere pastoral concern for young Christians, Paul says that we should not be unaware of Satan's schemes in order that he might not outwit us. He also warns us that he knows that Satan may disguise himself as an angel of light and that his servants, also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. (2 Corinthians 2:11; 11:14,15).

2. A new urgency to think in a biblical manner about Satan, demons and spiritual warfare in our day and age

In order to exercise the same pastoral concern for the people God has entrusted to our care, we need to know the present day trends of thinking concerning Satan and demons.

Christian thought about Satan remained fairly consistent until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

From about 1850 the ushering in of the **Age of Enlightenment** started as a consequence of industrialization, the rise of modern science. Human reason and intellectual proof, was advocated

as the primary source for legitimacy and authority. Millions in the Western world were influenced to embrace an overoptimistic view of the so called “scientific approach”.

Religious persecutions and wars also pushed people toward skepticism about religion. Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud helped to create a worldview according to which supernatural powers could not interrupt the natural realms of cause and effect. Since then, a growing number have dismissed the Devil as a figment of human imagination or as the “psychology of the ancients” no longer relevant in efforts to explain evil today. In the radical form expressed by Nietzsche: God is dead, Satan is dead.

A rapidly growing number of theological and philosophical scholars developed a method of interpreting Scriptures in which they demythologize and allegorize the biblical records on evil spirits. Rudolph Bultmann (1958:17) - soon followed by many others - made an attempt to make the message of the Bible fit a European enlightenment paradigm that, he reckoned, did not share the spirit world paradigm of the first century Mediterranean. He argued that the biblical language on the spirit world and the miraculous was merely a human way of speaking about God and not describing what was happening in actuality.

This kind of theologizing marginalized the Devil more and more to the periphery in Christian thinking.

The growing movement of liberal theology in some mainline churches in South Africa is leading to a total denial of the existence of Satan and demons. Janse van Rensburg, a theologian of the Dutch Reformed Church highlighted this in his book with the title: *The Occult Debate* (1999). He made it clear that epistemological views on occultism within the reformed tradition have drastically parted in South Africa. During the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in 2007 a report on a ministry of deliverance denied the existence of the Devil and claimed that it would be unscientific to embark on an empirical research in this regard. Dr. Kirkpatrick (2007:19) expressed a view at the seminary of the Dutch Reformed church in Pretoria that any ministry of deliverance or theological discussion on demon possession and other forms of demonic influences are to be perceived as nonsensical.

Theologians of this camp talk about the Devil with a tongue-in-the-cheek attitude. They refuse to believe in a personal Devil and ridicule the whole idea. This denial of Satan’s real personal existence usually takes the form of defining the idea of Satan as the mythical personification of evil but not actually as a being who has his own separate existence.

Another development is that of Albert Wink (1986:43) and Hendrikus Berkhof, who argued that Paul’s language concerning the powers in Ephesians and elsewhere was an attempt by the first century person to describe real social, economic, psychological and political structures that affected their everyday lives. They also deny the existence of a personal being called the devil, insisting that it is a “collective symbolization of evil” and “the collective of weight of human fallenness”. Rather than personal evil spirits, these forces are the inner or spiritual principles of an institution or nation — the culture, ethos and gestalt that affect how things are run.

It is of course true that throughout history, overtly evil socio-political systems like the idolatry of the Roman Caesars, the anti-Semitism of Hitler’s Nazism, the evil of human slavery, the atheism of the Communists, the dehumanization of Apartheid, the wickedness of the ethnic cleansing in parts of Africa, racism and terrorism of all forms, and the greed of capitalism have all demonstrated the extent to which the evil powers can influence world systems and seek to thwart the blessings of humanity.

It is also true that in covert forms, evil powers continue to influence humanity in the addiction of people in the drugs culture, in postmodern hedonism, the explosion of the pornographic industry, the disdain for the sanctity of human life, and the tyranny of secularism which denies people their true liberty to serve God. We indeed live in a society of high-profile bondage to “addictions” to drugs, pornography, sexual abuse and violence. Bizarre or troubled behaviour, often related to experiences of extreme abuse, seems to become the order of the day.

Through the tragic history of western civilization since 1914, the onset of World War I, the Devil as a person who is evil has made a comeback. There have always been those who took the Devil seriously and did their best to defend and give voice to traditional views, but the unimaginable evilness of evil in the twentieth century has boosted their efforts. No modern figure has done more to boost belief in the Devil than Adolf Hitler. Christopher Nugent, a historian at the University of Kentucky, has labelled the period beginning with the Third Reich "The Kingdom of Night: A Century of Satan."

A new development is that the Western World has begun to lose its faith, not now in religion, but in science and the autonomous human reason. The atheists and secularists are scared not of the Evangelicals but of their own "atheistic" children. "The sad irony," says theologian Don Carson: "is that the modernity which has arrogantly insisted that human reason is the final arbiter of truth has spawned a stepchild that has arisen to slay it." This "stepchild" of secularism is a society where paganism, witchcraft and occultism are exploding in all areas and spheres of life.

In Postmodern New Age circles one finds an obsession with and many speculations about angels. With regard to angels – which overlap with the doctrine of demonology – Noll (1998:11) makes the remark: "To theologize about angels is a most dubious undertaking in our day. But to ignore the subject of angels is to miss one of the comeback stories of the century."

In these circles the view is propagated that one should seek to communicate with angels, in the light of a belief that every human being has a guardian angel. Such a guiding spirit is regarded as more approachable than God therefore you should pray to your guardian angel. They also believe in healing angels and comforting angels (cf. Joubert, 1997:53). The New Age Movement also encourages people to discover their psychic abilities. Interest in Spiritism, Witchcraft and Clairvoyance (predicting the future) has drastically grown amongst all layers of society. Celebrities receiving entertainment awards publicly credit their "spirit guides" for their success. The contemporary question for many today is not the medieval query about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, but how one may contact, converse with, and "hug" one's guardian angel.

In South Africa the HIV/AIDS pandemic has lead to a new explosion of witchcraft, steeped in occultic rituals and practices. People are so desperate to find healing from AIDS that witchdoctors and wizards have grabbed the market to advertise potions and rituals for healing. A research project has revealed that the turnover from witchcraft medicine around Johannesburg has multiplied into billions.

In significant parts of African Christian circles, there is no difficulty at all in accepting the existence and reality of the influence of evil spirits. Confusion in this regard in Nigeria and the Congo is so bad that Pentecostal pastors for large fees of money exorcise evil spirits from vulnerable children to assist their parents or care givers to be liberated from all sorts of illnesses.

Any first time visitor to an average church service in any of the cities of West, Central and Southern Africa will be most impressed by the frequent reference to the devil and his demons. There are prayers for exorcising demons, binding Satan and delivering the oppressed in the congregation. Not only are the worshippers conscious of the battle against evil spirits, many church members and preachers specialize as "prayer warriors" who wage spiritual warfare against evil spirits.

A number of African scholars have argued that the situational context of Africa demands a contextualization that regards specific teachings as special cases for Africans. As eloquently put by Emmanuel Asante (2001:358), "Understood as deliverance not only from one's sinful selfhood but also from evil forces, salvation must address the concepts of evil and sin in the African context". It makes no sense to the African to deny the presence of evil powers, or to have a Saviour who could not provide a complete and decisive victory over such powers.

Asante further explains, "The African reality demands a Saviour who has the power not only to deliver the believer from evil powers but also to transform the lives of the bewitched and the dehumanized, enabling them to live actively in the community"

Having worked cross culturally for almost 30 years and having travelled around a bit in several African countries my observation is that the emphases on ancestral curses is wide spread. The concept of generational curses is an endemic worldview of parts of Africa, namely that the “sins of the fathers” are visited upon the generations after them (Exodus 20:4-6). It is defined by Marilyn Hickey (2000:13) as “an un-cleansed iniquity that increases in strength from generation to generation affecting the members of that family and all who come into relationship with that family”.

In parts of Africa, this is believed to include clan curses and spirits that are effortlessly inherited, even by those who marry into the family. Whereas this may be so, a failure to emphasize the complete victory of Christ over such generational spirits only fosters a mentality that paralyzes believers.

In their sincere desire to contextualize the Gospel in order to evangelize people in animistic cultures more effectively, some researchers and practitioners in missions, anthropology, and modern communications are being pulled into syncretism of the Christian faith with animistic cultures. The possible danger could be a Christianized form of animism that merely adds the Lord Jesus Christ to the list of powers in the African context. Contextualization needs a crucial nuance.

A growing number of Christians teach and practice “deliverance” ministry in the quest to cast out inhabiting demons.

Frank Peretti's two spiritual warfare novels, *This Present Darkness* (1988) and *Piercing the Darkness* (1989), captivated readers and more than 3.5 million copies have been sold.

In riveting storytelling, Peretti manages to excite imaginations on how evil spirits may operate to influence the daily happenings in villages and towns across the country and in the world at large.

Though merely novels, Peretti's creative accounts have quickly influenced a theological worldview in some evangelical circles that sees demons underneath almost every mug in the kitchen or table in the study and behind every bush. Without intending to do so, he has facilitated a systemization of the evil powers in the world, far beyond what the Bible teaches.

Somewhat contemporaneous with the publication of Peretti's works, C. Peter Wagner (Donald A. McGavran Professor of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary) became a leader of a growing spiritual warfare movement that promotes direct power encounters with demons and territorial spirits as a vital aspect of effective missions. He says:

The real battle for both world evangelisation and social justice is a spiritual battle and our principal weapon of spiritual warfare is prayer

(Wagner 1993c:200)¹

At the international Lausanne II conference in Manila in 1989 the spiritual warfare movement gained an official hearing from evangelical leaders when a “Spiritual Warfare Track” was established under the direction of Charles Kraft. The establishment of the A.D. 2000 United Prayer Track and the Spiritual Warfare Network under Wagner's leadership further strengthened the movement. Since then conferences on spiritual warfare have been held throughout the USA. This fixation on our supernatural enemy has given rise to a phenomenon of books on “spiritual warfare;” by last count over 400 books have been published on this subject in the 1990s!

In his book *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, Clinton Arnold challenges us to “get the upper hand on [demons] before they get it on us.” He evaluates such aspects of contemporary spiritual warfare as “demolishing strongholds,” “demon possession,” “binding the strong man,” SLSW (“strategic level spiritual warfare”), “warfare prayer,” “territorial spirits,” “spiritual mapping,” “identificational repentance,” the “genealogical transmission of demons,” “deliverance ministries,” “power encounters” versus “truth encounters,” etc. Some of the claims made by spiritual warfare writers are alarming. Peter Wagner, for example, declares that warfare prayer helps to bring “about effective evangelism” and can increase receptivity to the gospel “virtually overnight.”

This approach has been embraced in parts of Africa: With regard to the concept of territorial spirits, Opoku Onyinah (2004:337) points out that it is “the notion that the demons assume a hierarchy with powers of greater and lesser ranks, and having specific geographical assignments”. Derived

from Daniel 10, the teaching emphasizes that territorial spirits wield their influence over particular geographical regions, tribes, people groups, neighborhoods and other significant social networks. The result of their influence is to change the course of the social, economic and political situations in the world.

Systematizing this teaching further, some interpreters on the continent of Africa have speculated that these demonic powers have specific names that are required to be known if spiritual warfare is to be successful. In yet a further interpretation of Asamoah-Gyadu (2004:389-406) the concepts of ancestral spirits are merged with territorial spirits to produce a doctrine that requires nations to exorcize the demons of economic mismanagement and corruption before the African continent may begin to prosper.

All these extremes create the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of a biblical and reformed perspective on demonology. We must recover biblical sanity about these spiritual creatures.

As David Powlison says: "A great deal of fiction, superstition, fantasy, nonsense, nuttiness, and downright heresy flourishes in the church under the guise of 'spiritual warfare' in our time".

It often distracts the attention from the real warfare we need to wage and mislead Christians to bypass the most important issues for the church and God's kingdom.

3. The Authority of Scripture and Hermeneutical practice

In considering the publications about Satan and demons and angels, it is apparent that paths within theological approaches and church practices around demonology separate on opinions about the authority of Scripture.

It seems that those who deny the ontological existence of Satan and demons and those who become obsessed with the Devil and demons have one thing in common: They do not take the authority of Scriptures seriously and as a result they apply a hermeneutical approach in interpretation of passages that in fact denies the unity of Scripture and the basic reformational rule that Bible passages should be understood within their context, that the goal or scopus of a text should determine the meaning of a passage and doctrine should be formulated through comparing various passages that deals with the same truths (*Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.)

This inevitably leads to the epistemological question of how one comes to the truth. Crucial questions that should be asked are the following:

Is the use of anecdotes sufficient to establish a doctrine and justify new practices as someone like Charles Kraft defends?

Should we accept information from the spirit world and claim to receive accurate information from demons? Charles Kraft defends himself and Peter Wagner relying on animist beliefs in dealing with the spirit world and suggests that animists are not as ignorant as some may think and possess reliable knowledge concerning principles that govern the spirit world (Kraft 1995:98).

What is the relation between the authority of Scripture and guidance of the Holy Spirit? Wagner claims that God told him to take leadership in the area of territorial spirits (Wagner 1996a:20) and claims to have apostolic authority and a divine appointment to reshape Christianity, which is primarily based on extra-biblical revelation (Wagner 1996a:20, 2000b:80-82, 113-114; 116-119, 127). He and Kraft claim that they have special guidance from the Holy Spirit as the third wave of the Holy Spirit revival has been ushered in. Yet this doctrine is fiercely rejected even by other charismatic theologians.

Scott Moreau rightly states:

As Evangelicals we can never allow personal narratives to replace the investigative methods of history, the social sciences and theology which have stood the test of time (Moreau 1997:124).

As Christians, we put our faith in the Lord who has revealed himself in His Word. It is his Word that has the authority in our lives. This means that our personal experience is never the authority upon which we base our beliefs.

We turn to the words of the Holy Spirit in Scriptures to be taught, rebuked, corrected, and trained – not to my experiences, or to the experiences of anyone else, no matter how wise or learned they may appear.

A remark of Martin Luther in this regard is right on spot: “The devil has no better way to conquer us than by leading us away from the Word and to the Spirit.... But one should hold fast to the Word and not concede the Spirit to people apart from the Word.”

4. Biblical Teaching on Satan and demons

Satan is not just an evil, impersonal influence, but a very real person, a fallen angel with supernatural powers.

THE NATURE OF SATAN

Satan is a fallen angel. Therefore all that is true of angels in general is true of Satan and his fallen angels (demons).

- **He is a Creature** like all angels, Satan is a creature, created by Christ, the Creator of all things as it is written in Colossians 1:15,16:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through him and for him

(cf. also John 1:1; Psalm 148:1-5).

- **He is a Spirit Being:** Hebrews 1:14 describes angels as spirits and demons are called unclean spirits (Matthew 8:16; 12:45; Luke 7:21; 8:2; 11:26; Acts 19:12; Revelation 16:14). Further, the fact we are told that “we do not wrestle with 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 heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12) also suggest that Satan and his demons are spirit beings. Finally, the fact that Paul describes them as invisible also shows they are spirit beings (Colossians 1:16).
- **He has limitations:** Though extremely powerful, Satan is neither omnipotent, omniscient, nor omnipresent. He simply cannot be everywhere at once. However, as the chief of his forces of demons or as the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2), he is chief of a vast host of demons who are so numerous as to make Satan’s power and presence seem to be practically ubiquitous or everywhere at once (cf. Mark 5:9).

Because of this limitation, many references to Satan or the devil include his whole kingdom. The person of Satan does not personally tempt each of us for he simply cannot do that. He is only able to do so through his influence in world systems and hosts of demons.

We surely have clear references to the person of Satan himself when we read not only of his appearance when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord (Job 1:6), in the temptation of Christ (Matthew 4:10f), and the entrance into Jude (Luke 22:3) but also in many other passages, Satan or the devil seems to stand for Satan’s kingdom (see Mark 3:23; 4:15; Luke 13:16; 1 Peter 5:8-9; James 4:7). It is also comforting to know that Satan is limited. The promise of Scripture is that “greater is He who is in us, than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). In spite of all his power and hatred against God and man, he could do nothing against Job that God did not expressly allow. Therefore, he can be resisted and made to flee (James 4:7), but that will only happen when the strength of God is made available to believers in Christ (Ephesians 6:10-18).

SPECIFIC NAMES APPLIED TO SATAN

A study of the names of Satan will demonstrate that he has many faces, schemes, and approaches and they aren't always obvious or ugly.

Satan and demons are at war against God, angels, and Christians. Satan is the

- adversary,
- accuser,
- destroyer,
- deceiver,
- father of lies,
- tempter,
- murderer,
- evil one,
- and a real enemy.

- ***Satan (Job 1:6-9; Matthew 4:10)***

The title “Satan” (σατανας) occurs 53 times in the Bible. The primary idea is ‘adversary, one who withstands.’ It points to Satan as the opponent of God, of believers, and all that is right and good. We should note, however, that Satan often appears as an angel of light promising what is supposed to be good (2 Corinthians 11:14), but it is only a sham to further aid him in his work as the arch enemy and adversary in opposition to God and what is truly good.

- ***The Devil (Matthew 4:1, 5, 9; Ephesians 4:27; Revelation 12:9; 20:2)***

“Devil” is the Greek word diabolos which means “slanderer, defamer.” This accentuates his goal and work to dispute the character of God. 1 Peter 5:8 where he is called “our adversary” (αντιδικος) it indicates Satan’s adversarial activity as the defamer and maligner of God and believers. αντιδικος refers to ‘an opponent in a lawsuit’ often used of a courtroom scene where accusations are made.

When we read Acts 1:8 in the light of Isaiah 43:8-13 we are drawn into a court scene. There is a conflict between the eternal Triune God and the gods of this world.

Jesus stands on trial, not now before Pontius Pilate, as he did before He was crucified, but at the bar of world opinion. The “world”, which in biblical language means secular, godless, non-Christian society, is in the role of judge. The world is judging Jesus continually. Passing its various verdicts upon Him. The devil accuses Him with many ugly lies and musters his false witnesses by the hundreds and thousands.

- ***The Serpent (Revelation 12:9)***

This name for Satan indicates his crafty deception and guile (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 12:9).

- ***The Evil One (John 17:15; 1 John 5:9)***

In these two passages, Satan is described of as “the evil one.” The Greek adjective, πονηρος, means “wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, degenerate.” Nearly all other translations including the NKJV translate “the evil one.” πονηρος points to Satan’s character as active and malignant. It denotes what is not only ugly and useless, but what is injurious and destructive. Satan, as the πονηρος one is actively engaged in destruction, in causing pain, injury, and death. He is a cancer to the human race. John’s statement also shows how the world lies under his evil and sinister grasp.

- ***The Dragon (Revelation 12:7)***

In this passage Satan is called “the dragon.” The Greek word is δρακων and refers to a “hideous monster, a dragon, or large serpent.” This word stresses the cruel, vicious, and blood thirsty character and power of Satan.

- ***The Prince or Ruler of this world (John 12:31)***

Some translation have “prince” and others “ruler” as in John 12:31. The Greek αρχων του κοσμου τουτου literally means, “the ruler of this world system.” This points to Satan as the head and energy behind the arrangements of things as they are in the world today in their opposition against God, His plan, and people under his reign.

- ***The God of This World or Age (2 Corinthians 4:4)***

The fact that Satan is called, the god of this world (ο θεος του αιωνος τουτου) emphasizes Satan’s rulership over this final period of history which is so marked by a growing increase in apostasy, deception, and moral decay. In Galatians 1:4, Paul calls this “the present evil age.” The point is, Satan is the reason this age will never improve. Because it gets its character from Satan, the evil one, it is an evil age that grows worse because of his presence and activity to both undermine the plan of God and set up his own rule and worship.

- ***The prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2)***

This designation points to Satan as the head of the demonic hosts (Ephesians 2:2) which includes all the fallen angelic beings who operate night and day in our immediate atmosphere filling the world with Satan’s propaganda, deception, doubts and temptations. Though the word “power” is singular, many commentaries believe it refers to the demonic forces as a corporate body, all of whom operate as one organized body under Satan, their ruler (see Ephesians 6:12). This does not only indicate the locality of their operations, but emblematically portrays the prevailing influence or spiritual atmosphere in which every individual and the world moves — an atmosphere of demonic influence controlled by Satan.

Like our expression “the spirit of the age” it can also refer to the disposition, the outlook, the way of thinking and acting which one finds in the children of disobedience.

- ***The Accuser of the Brethren (Revelation 12:10)***

When Satan is called “the Accuser,” it refers to him at work constantly accusing believers when they sin. The Greek word for “accuser” is κατηγορος των αδελφων, refers to one who brings condemning accusations against others. One of Satan’s daily activities is to accuse believers before God. Some of you will hear: ***“you are a failure, you are without hope, you are beyond the love of God, you are beyond the grace of God, what you have done can never be forgiven, God does not love you, you should die, you should kill yourself.”*** Because it’s from a spirit being who is unseen, you think you have low self-esteem, negative self-image, negative self-talk, but it’s accusation. It is the Devil’s accusation.

In view of Job 1 and 2, this is also an attempt to malign the character of God and His plan.

It is of course true that none of us are sinless (1 John 1:9-10), we have the Lord Jesus as our continuous Advocate to plead our case (Romans 8:33-34; 1 John 2:1-2).

- ***The Tempter (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5)***

Satan is also called the tempter (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). This was the origin on earth of all the misery that we know — Satan tempted Eve to sin, and sin brought with it the curse of God on the natural order (Genesis 3:14-19; Romans 8:21-23). Since that time Satan has been tempting all human beings to do what will hurt themselves and others.

To be sure, there is flesh within us, a seed of rebellion from our first father, Adam, that wants to disregard, dishonour, disobey God, but then Satan comes along and he will provide for us tempting opportunities.

Satan’s first device to draw the soul into sin is, to present the bait — and hide the hook; to present the golden cup — and hide the poison; to present the sweet, the pleasure, and the profit that may flow in upon the soul by yielding to sin — and to hide from the soul the wrath and misery that will certainly follow the committing of sin.

You need to know, when you're tempted to sin, there's a demonic battle that's raging in your life. And Satan is saying, "Sin against God. Join the darkness. Align yourself with my team."

- ***Belial (2 Corinthians 6:15)***

This name means "worthless" or "hopeless ruin." In 2 Corinthians, Paul uses it as a name for Satan as the epitome of worthlessness, hopeless ruin and the source of all idolatry and religion which is also hopeless or futile.

- ***Beelzebul (Matthew 12:24; Mark 3:22)***

Beelzebul means "lord of the dung," a name of reproach. *Beelzebub* means "lord of the flies." Either one of these are names of reproach and are names of uncleanness applied to Satan, the prince of the demons and uncleanness. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all define Beelzebul as the prince of demons. So this name epitomizes Satan as the leader of the demon hosts and the cause of the demon possession.

- ***Abaddon, Apollyon (Revelatin 9:11)***

Abaddon is the Greek form and *Apollyon* is the Hebrew equivalent. Primarily, this title stresses his work of destruction; he works to destroy the glory of God and God's purpose with man. He further works to destroy societies and mankind . . . Jesus says elsewhere he comes to kill, rob, destroy. That's what he does. He doesn't bring order. He **brings disorder**. He doesn't bring harmony. He brings **conflict**. He destroys marriages. He **destroys relationships**. He destroys legacies of generations. He **destroys churches**.

- ***Father of Lies (John 8:44)***

In John 8:44, Jesus says the devil is the father of lies. The lie is the sphere in which he holds his place. Falsehood is his natural and peculiar element.

Lying is his native language.

He's been lying since the beginning.

He instigates people to speak lies.

When Peter rebuked Ananias for his deception, he attributed the source of the lie to Satan: "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?"

Lying is speaking a demonic language.

It's not just promulgating error. It is more than that. It's speaking a demonic language. If you lie, you're doing something that is evil. If you believe lies, they will destroy you.

- ***Murderer (John 8:44)***

He is also called a murderer. This is his final goal. He hates life. God is the living God. God is the author of life. **And Satan is the one who loves death**. He wants marriages to die, families to die, friendships to die, cultures to die. He wants churches to die. He wants the unborn to die. He wants you to die through reckless behavior, severe depression, suicidal thoughts. It gives him great pleasure to see you dead.

HIS AGENTS

As a creature, Satan is not omnipresent. Thus, in passages like, 1 Thessalonians 3:5 and 1 Corinthians 7:5, the references to Satan simply point him out as the ultimate source, but he must rely on the following agents to carry out his temptation: (1) his network of demons, (2) the world system which lies under his control (1 John 5:19), (3) he is able to use carnal or ignorant Christians as he used Peter (Matthew 16:22-23), (4) unbelievers under his influence or domination (Luke 22:1-6; Ephesians 2:2; Revelation 13).

HIS AVENUES:

The three primary avenues of his temptation are: the lusts of the flesh, of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

THE APPLIED PROCESS SATAN USES:

Satan uses the mind and emotions to get people to make negative choices against God. Temptation itself is never sin. Though we can be foolish and set ourselves up for temptation (cf. Proverbs 7:6-10), it is our response to temptation that leads to sin (see Proverbs 4:23; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:8; James 1:12-15).

• *The work of demons in the lives of non believers*

Non believers who are worshipping false gods are in fact worshipping demons. Paul says clearly in 1 Corinthians 10:20: ... what pagans sacrifice, they offer to demons and not to God.

When God commissioned Paul, he sent him to turn the Gentiles, the unsaved, “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18).

Not only does Satan hold the unsaved under his reign, but he also blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4).

By worshipping demons or participating in practices of divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, people open themselves up to demonic control. Such things is an abomination to the Lord so that eventually their thoughts, their deeds, and their identity more and more become dominated by an alternate personality, by another being.

It is the greatest judgment in the world to be left to sin. O unhappy man — when God leaves you to yourself, and does not resist you in your sins! Woe, woe to him at whose sins God winks at. When God lets the way to hell be a smooth and pleasant way — that is hell on this side hell, and a dreadful sign of God's indignation against a man; a token of his rejection, and that God does not intend good unto him.

Habitual, unrepentant sin, drug and alcohol abuse, that strips a person from all self-controlled and inhibitions can lead human beings to become worse than animals as the picture of the demonized man of whom we read in Luke 8:26–39. “For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house, but among the tombs.” The demon or demons in this man have thoroughly taken over his personality. Someone can be so overtaken by an unclean spirit, they can yield so much of themselves that the unclean spirit now dominates and dictates their personality. This man has completely yielded himself to that which is unclean.

The Western world just call this a clinical diagnosis of something like a multiple personality disorder. We don't know what to do, we don't know what to say, we don't know how to diagnose these, so what we say is they have multiple people. I'm not saying that every person that has MPD is demonized. But I'm saying that in our world that doesn't believe in the living God and doesn't believe in Satan and demons, they don't know how to diagnose, love, and treat people, help people who really have been taken captive in war.

Demonized people are not just crazy, hearing voices. They are really hearing voices. They're not just manifesting another personality that they invented from trauma to cope with suffering, which is what some people do, but maybe they have opened themselves up through lies, and temptations, and accusations, and spiritism, and demonism, and occultism, and addiction to the point where they actually have demons, unclean spirits at work in them and through them to destroy them. Sometimes they're not just role-playing, or having a psychological issue, they're manifesting a demon. Someone else has taken over, a spirit being, has taken over their physical body.

Medication, for some who have a physical condition, can help. But for those who are demonized, they need Jesus. And they need repentance and truth, and the indwelling presence and power of God the Holy Spirit, so they'll be controlled by the power of God, not the power of the enemy.

- ***The attack of demons in the lives of believers***

Demons do not own or possess any Christians. A Christian is God's sole possession. ***But you can open yourself up to demonic influences.*** Even though you belong to God, you can participate with Satan, as Peter does on one occasion where Jesus had to say to him: "Get behind me, Satan." Satan didn't fill and control Peter, but Peter was listening to him, speaking for him, working for him. And so Jesus rebuked Satan and ultimately Peter's work with him. An unbeliever, can end up like the demonized man, totally controlled. ***As a believer, you can end up like Peter, participating in the enemy's work even though you belong to Jesus. It's very serious business.***

Though Christians cannot be owned or have their eternal destiny controlled by a demon, this does not necessarily mean that they cannot be demonized or temporarily controlled by demons or have demons temporarily indwell them.

We need to be reminded regularly of the devices Satan uses to attack people.

→ **Pride:**

The Bible often makes it clear that pride is not only the reason for Satan's fall but also the source of all that is demonic.

That is why James specifically refers to pride when he instructs us how to resist the Devil.

"God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:6-7).

Augustine said that pride is the mother of all the other sins. We are made to believe that self esteem is a great virtue and not a vice and that pride is a good thing and not a bad thing. So many cultures are really infiltrated with a demonic value system of pride. That leads to power struggles and violence and a lack of forgiveness.

→ **Hanging on to grudges:**

In Ephesians 4:27 Paul warns believers against giving Satan a foothold. Bitterness, pride and the lack of self-control during anger give the devil a half open door through which he attacks. A desire for retaliation is instigated by Satan.

In his wonderful practical instructions Thomas Brooks in his *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices* says:

Therefore, believers must continually be on guard against division, joining together and walking in grace and holiness as a "precious remedy against Satan's devices."

5. Full Armor of God

The most important fact about Satan that Scripture gives us is that he is a defeated foe. Colossians 2:15 tells us that Jesus Christ disarmed the powers and authorities and "made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the Cross." Satan has lost the big war. He is now engaged in guerilla warfare against us, and we can defeat him in this day-to-day struggle.

Paul's instruction to put on the full armour of God is a command.

Christians clearly have the identity (being in Christ), the authority (being seated with Christ), and the mandate to resist Satan and his demons. We do so not on the basis of our own goodness, but on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross. Because the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4), we can successfully stand against demonic schemes. Our weapons in this ongoing struggle include our authority as seated with Christ at the right hand of God, far above every power (Ephesians 1:15–2:6), the name of Jesus (Philippians 2:10), our spiritual armour (Ephesians 6:18), prayer (a must in all cases, Mark 9:29), simple resistance

(James 4:7), forgiveness (Ephesians 4:26–27), and exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 4:22–29; 6:10–18).

Paul notes that through the church, “the manifold wisdom of God” will be made known to the principalities and powers. As the church as the bride of Christ, extends the gospel, the very presence of the church is a declaration of the manifold wisdom of God to these evil powers. John Stott’s (1979:123) explanation of this verse is not just poetic, “The multi-racial, multi-cultural community is like a beautiful tapestry. . . . History is the theatre, the world is the stage, and the church members in every land are the actors”.

6. Conclusion

The testimony of the Scriptures regarding Satan and demons is clear and cohesive. They are angelic entities who oppose God’s sovereign control. They seek to work out their unholy rebellion through influencing people to live in a way contrary to God’s expressed intentions. At the same time, they remain under his sovereignty and can be used of him to effect the divine plan. As Christians we are to submit ourselves to God and resist the attacks of Satan and his hosts. To do so, we must be aware of the basic truths presented in Scripture concerning not just the ontology of demons but their methods as they attempt to influence our lives. Once aware, we are to take our stand in Christ and oppose the working of demons, whether personally, corporately, or in the structures and systems of society.

We can sing with Luther:

A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.”
For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe.
His craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

And though this world with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him.
His rage we can endure,
for lo his doom is sure.
One little word shall fell him.

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¹ The emphasis expressed by ‘bold’ print is Wagner’s.

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