

## The Strategies of Satan

By David de Bruyn

'Know your enemy' is a phrase often used. Sometimes it can be simply the overexcited cries of the soccer coach, and sometimes it can be the dead-serious advice of a military general. It's always true – if you are to come out victorious, you need to know something of the adversary.

Sadly, very few Christians know much about our enemy. We are waging the greatest battle of all time, but many believers are under-equipped to face the enemy they are up against. The enemy is not other human beings. Paul says in **Ephesians 6:12**: *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."*

Though humans may be used by our enemies, our true enemies are spiritual forces: Satan, and his demons. While people scoff at the idea of Satan, our Lord Jesus spoke of Satan and dealt with him as a personal being, not as an impersonal force of evil. Peter made sure he underlined the fact that the devil was alive and very active: *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"* (**1 Peter 5:8**).

Unfortunately, many strange and unbiblical ideas have entered the church regarding spiritual warfare. Most of them are completely foreign to Scripture, but as soon as someone accompanies their supposed method of spiritual warfare with exciting stories of power encounters with demons, few stop to question if that is Biblical.

Biblical spiritual warfare is something quite different to what goes on today in the name of spiritual warfare. One of the fundamental aspects of spiritual warfare is to simply know the adversary's strategies. If we understand what Satan is attempting to do, we can counter him – not by endlessly binding and rebuking him, but by resisting him. We resist his strategies when we do not give into the sin and unbelief he seeks to produce.

In **2 Corinthians 2:11**, Paul warns the Corinthians against harbouring unforgiveness against a sinning brother, and then says: *"lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices."*

Paul does not want to give the Devil an advantage to exploit in the church, for we are not ignorant or unaware of his designs and plans. Paul says, because we know what Satan tries to do, we should not give him an advantage in the church by not forgiving each other. God really does want us to know how Satan operates.

We must beware of two extremes. The one extreme is a fascination with Satan and his demons, which is wrong. Some believers become so enthralled by Satan, his work and the demons, they seem to make it their favourite Bible doctrine. Pretty soon, all they talk about is spiritual warfare, Satanism, the occult, demon possession, and the casting out of demons.

What they are doing is giving Satan a lot more glory and attention than they ought to. Satan is a defeated foe. He is still dangerous, but to the believer, he is no longer deadly. The book of Jude alludes to the fact that false teachers sometimes say things about demons and Satan which are wrong, and Jude shows that even Michael the archangel when fighting with the devil didn't adopt the foolish position they do.

I believe an obsession with the Devil and demons is spiritually dangerous. Some Christians may open the door to demonic oppression in their lives, not through tarot cards and other evil things, but through a continual obsession and focus on Satan and the demons, and a desire to know their names, and hear them – supposedly in the name of the Lord, but very often simply out of curiosity.

The other extreme are the Christians who seem to pretend that Satan and the demons don't even exist. They figure all of that is almost a fairy-tale, they imagine that Satan and his demons have no impact on their lives at all. These believers are also setting themselves up for a fall, because ignorance of Satan's traps does not mean you won't walk right into one.

So it's important to at least try to understand some of Satan's strategies. God, in His wisdom, has revealed to us some of Satan's actions so we can be prepared. We see Satan's work most clearly in three instances in the Bible. The first is in the Garden of Eden with Eve, the second is with Job, and the third is with the Lord Jesus Christ. Eve failed totally, Job was somewhat faithful, but failed in other areas, and the Lord Jesus Christ perfectly overcame the Devil.

Looking at these three events, we see a pattern emerging. There is a similarity of approach that the Devil seems to use, which we can be fairly sure will be the case, more or less, with each one of us. Understand what Satan's goal is: it is, essentially, to deceive.

The reality of who God is, and what He offers mankind, is of course infinitely better than what is coming to Satan. Therefore, Satan cannot offer mankind anything better. He must deceive us into believing that God's way is not best. All humans naturally act in their own self-interest. So Satan's strategies revolve around seeking to turn that self-interest away from God's glory and His truth to self-destructive lies. Satan seems to commonly use five strategies when trying to deceive mankind:

## **1. Satan presents his belief system as the most satisfying**

Satan is propagating a philosophy. He comes to mankind with a story of what will really satisfy. He presents a worldview – a belief system – which he sells as the real meaning of life, as the best way to live. In fact, the Bible has a name for this belief system. It calls it 'the world':

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*

**1 John 2:15-16**

That's Satan's belief system. Make no mistake – it is not that he believes it. Satan knows the truth. Satan is not deceived; he is a deceiver. He knows what is true and distorts, hides and changes the truth. So he presents this false view that the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life is the ultimate way to spend life.

What are those three things? The lust of the flesh is a strong desire to gratify your physical desires – be it in food, sex, leisure or thrill-seeking. It is a desire for physical experiences. The lust of the eyes is a strong desire for what you can see. It is a coveting after what appears glorious on the surface. Appearances are everything!

Whether it be the desire to dress better than others, to have a fancier car, to be seen in the trendiest places, or be seen with an attractive partner – the lust of the eyes says, to have all you can see, to be looked upon as great – this is life! The pride of life is the desire to rule yourself. It is a desire to be better than others, exalted above others and worshipped. It is to rule your own destiny, be submitted to no one, but be loved by all.

Now on these three pillars of experiences, appearances, and self-rule, Satan presents a philosophy of what you should live for. We see it with Eve:

*And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

**Genesis 3:6**

She saw it was good for food – there's the lust of the flesh; she saw it was pleasant to the eyes – there's the lust of the eyes, and it was a tree desired to make one wise – there's the pride of life. We also see these temptations worked upon with Job. But because Job was a wealthy man, Satan tempted him not with more, but with less.

Remember that a poor man can be equally guilty of greed as a rich man can, the only difference is in the amount they actually possess. The heart is what matters. So Satan tempted Job with the lust of the flesh by removing his wealth and his bodily comforts. He tempted Job with the lust of the eyes by covering him with boils and ruining his physical appearance. Then he tempted Job with the pride of life by stripping him of his respected position in society and ruining his reputation.

Likewise with Christ. We see Satan tempting Jesus with the lust of the flesh by offering him bread to break His fast. We see him tempting Jesus with the lust of the eyes by showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof, and offering them to Christ if He would just worship Satan. And we see him tempting Jesus in the area of the pride of life by suggesting He throw Himself off the Temple to be caught by angels, and instantly worshipped as Messiah.

Not much has changed. Satan still uses the same three. All around us in the media, online, in society, in our interactions with people, in business, in civil society – we see these values propagated. Life is all about being comfortable – having nice things, experiencing nice things, being admired by others for your nice things and your nice experiences.

Satan comes at us with a philosophy of what is most rewarding in life. That's his first point of attack.

## **2. Satan uses his belief system on our weak points**

In combat, it always makes sense to seek the weakest part of the defences of the enemy. To select their strongest point is a waste of resources. Satan is no different. He zeroes in on the area that we struggle with. For Eve, it was probably unsatisfied curiosity over the tree. So, he made a big deal over why God was not allowing them to eat of it.

With Job, it was probably the fact that he feared anything negative happening to him and his children. We see that he dutifully offered sacrifices for his children, saying *'It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.'* Later, we hear him saying *"the thing that I feared has come upon me."* Job may have believed if he kept sacrificing and being reasonably good, nothing bad would ever happen.

Perhaps Job felt he could almost control God, or at the very least, make life nice and predictable. And so Satan rocked his world by giving him his worst nightmare, in spite of his goodness. Remember though, that Satan is totally under the sovereignty of God. Satan himself said to God that He God had hedged Job in, so that Satan could do nothing to him. It was only with God's permission that Satan could tempt him in this way.

Now, when it comes to Christ, we cannot rightly speak of any weak points. But perhaps we can say that the area where Jesus would have had the most temptation was the very fact that He was God in the flesh, and yet veiling many of His powers. He purposely lay aside many of His prerogatives, so as to fulfil God's plan of atonement.

So Satan challenges Jesus to prove Himself, almost, with the repetition of the line *"If you are the Son of God..."* The whole use of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride of life orbits this idea: 'Prove you are God. Burst through this weak covering of human flesh, and prove Your deity.' So, Satan seeks to exploit our weak points.

## **3. Satan distorts the Word of God**

This is a third strategy of Satan's. Since God's Word are living and powerful, Satan makes sure he twists, distorts and perverts them.

He may outrightly dispute God's Word, as he did with Eve: *"And the serpent said unto the woman, 'Ye shall not surely die.'" Here he flatly contradicts God. Earlier, he exaggerated the Word of God when he said, "Yea, hath God said, 'Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" Satan immediately makes God sound unreasonable, and Eve foolishly tries to defend God. While doing so, she opens the door for his lies about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

With Job, Satan distorted the Word of God through Job's three friends – Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Much of what these three men saying Job is true, but it isn't true of Job. Truth incorrectly applied is as good as lies.

With Christ, we see Him distorting the Word, saying. *"If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone"* (**Matthew 4:6**). Satan is here quoting **Psalms 91:11-12**, a very appropriate Psalm about God's protection. But he conveniently omits a phrase: *"to keep thee in all thy ways."*

God protects you to keep you on the right path. Satan made sure he left this phrase out, because it would surely reveal the foolish nature of his temptation – jumping off the Temple would not be in keeping with God's ways. Satan preys on the ignorance of God's people. *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,"* **Hosea 4:6** says.

God promises curses to those who add to or subtract from His Word in **Revelation 22:18-19**. We need to know the Word of God, so we do not accept the distorted counterfeit that the Devil uses. Satan is still doing that. Whether it is through supposed teachers of religion at universities, through false teachers, or sadly, even through some preachers – Satan uses them to create doubt and mistrust for God's Word.

#### **4. Satan defames God**

In order to have people follow him, Satan must create distrust for the Good Shepherd. Sheep have no reason to simply leave one shepherd and follow another, unless they have been led to believe that their current shepherd is actually out to harm them. With Eve, this is very clear.

Satan says this of God: *"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."* In other words, Satan was saying, 'God has misled you about the tree. He is withholding things from you. You can't trust God, He is actually threatened by you, and doesn't want you to have the best in this life. God is holding out on you to profit Himself. You can't trust God to give you a good life, trust me instead.'

With Job, Satan again used Job's three friends to portray God in a way that was not true. In fact, God says in **Job 42:7**: *"The LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath."* Job's friends had misrepresented God.

To a degree, Satan did this as well with Christ. His whole approach was, 'Why doesn't God give you the glory due to you now? Why are you trudging around a desert, hungry, alone, and unknown? You're supposed to be the Son of God! You're supposed to be full, honoured, receiving glory, and acclaimed. God seems to be holding back on you. If you follow my plan, you can have glory now!'

To this day, humankind's problem is that we continue to mistrust God, and trust Satan. We believe God is stealing joy instead of giving it, that He's a cosmic killjoy out to dampen the mood of the entire universe. We believe God is the author of evil in this world, instead of Satan. And here comes Satan's final strategy.

## 5. Satan glorifies sin

Satan wants man to sin for one reason – he hates God and wants to destroy as much of God's creation as possible. Man is created in God's image, and Satan delights to mar that image further. He further knows God is just and will punish sin, so he wants to invoke as much righteous anger from God upon sin as possible.

Of course, God's victory at Calvary is the final blow, but Satan still seeks to wage guerilla warfare – sniping at man, trying to cause man to ruin himself and move even faster towards a Christless eternity. To do this, Satan must present rebellion against God as not only safe, but as preferable.

See, **Ephesians 5:29** is an interesting verse: *"For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it."* In other words, humans do not deliberately harm themselves. Even suicide is a person trying to help themselves escape the pain of life. People always do what benefits them. So we will not believe that sin is going to harm us, so we can still indulge in it.

Humans must first believe that there are no consequences. At the very least, we must believe that those consequences will only happen one day. And of course, the Devil assures us that that day has not yet come. Then, believing it is safe to rebel against God, Satan assures humans that this sin is by far more rewarding, more pleasurable, more beneficial than following God's commands.

Satan insists that following God will cause you to miss out, to lose out, to have life pass you by, while following him instead will produce real satisfaction. Satan did this with Eve, saying, in essence, 'Rebelling against God won't kill you! Rather, you'll be better off than you are now. You'll be like gods – knowing good and evil.' He glorified sin.

With Job, he used Job's wife to make cursing God seem better than living. She said in **Job 2:9**: *"Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die."* Satan wanted just that – for Job to curse God. He used Job's own wife to make suicide sound like a better option. And with Christ, Satan tried to make sin sound very appealing: 'People will worship you if you jump off the Temple; you will have glory if you worship me.'

A rat trap would not work if there were no cheese in it. Satan minimises or denies the consequences that God promises for sin, and maximises the pleasure that the sin will bring.

So these seem to be Satan's basic tactics:

1. He uses a belief system that life is really about the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and pride of life.

2. He uses this on our differing and unique weak points.
3. He then distorts the Word of God, so we doubt and waiver.
4. He defames God so that we mistrust Him, and seek to transfer our trust to someone else.
5. Then he makes sin appear safe and satisfying.

It's fine and well to know that these are Satan's strategies – but how do we resist him? Well, Christ's example is the perfect one.

Firstly, He overcame Satan's belief system, even when applied to an area when He may've seemed most vulnerable, by maintaining the Biblical belief system. And we could sum it up like this: God is far more satisfying than anything the world can offer. As Asaph puts it in **Psalm 73:25**: *"Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."*

When Satan tempted Jesus to eat, Jesus said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone – but by every word that proceed from the mouth of God"* (**Matthew 4:4**). In other words, God is more satisfying to me than the physical experience of eating bread. 'I'd rather be hungry and filled with God, than full and empty of Him.'

When Satan tempts Jesus to throw Himself off the temple, Jesus says, 'I will never tempt my Father. I want His approval of Me more than the acclaim of the crowds. God's pleasure over Me is more satisfying than man's approval.' When Satan told Jesus to worship him in exchange for the kingdoms of the world, Jesus said, 'The Father alone is worthy of worship. I love Him with all My heart soul and mind, no one else will usurp His place in My heart.'

Each time, Jesus was stating the belief system that we need to reinforce in our minds – God is far more satisfying than anything the world has to offer. Jesus overcame temptation not by denying Himself a good thing, but by embracing the promise of something better. To Him, God was better than bread, applause and fame.

Secondly, Jesus overcame Satan's distortion of the Word of God by knowing the Word Himself. Each time Satan tempted Him, His reply was, 'It is written, it is written, it is written.' We need to memorise the Word of God. We cannot always look up a chapter and verse in every situation. We need to have a plan to memorise the Word of God, to be able to wield it when Satan tempts us.

Knowing the Word will mean we know when Satan is defaming the character of God. We will know God as He is, not Satan's perverted caricature of Him. We will also know the true consequences of sin, not Satan's sugar-coated version. We will know the true blessings and promises of righteousness. So we will put our mouths out of taste for the short-term satisfaction of sin, and develop a heart-appetite for God.

Third, Jesus was firm and decisive with Satan. Eve got into a discussion over God's Word with the devil. Eve gave herself enough time to doubt, and therefore be deceived. Jesus was very firm and to the point. Eventually, with His authority as the Son of God, He could exclaim, *"Be*

*gone Satan!”* When we dilly-dally with temptation, we are going down the road of a double-minded man, liable to be tossed to and fro.

When Jesus spoke of dealing with sin, He used amputating a limb and dismembering yourself as illustrations. That speaks of an extremely firm, decisive action against sin. We are to give no occasion to the flesh, and abstain from all appearance of evil. Be firm and decisive to say no to the promise of sin, and yes to the promise of righteousness.

*‘Resist the devil, and he will flee from you’ (James 4:7).* We do not resist him by shouting out various incantations.

- We resist him by refusing his belief system and believing God’s belief system – that He is the greatest joy in life, and that the way of the transgressor is hard.
- We resist him by loving the Word and hiding it in our hearts, by so meditating on it that we see the beauty of God and the ugliness of sin.
- We resist him by admitting our vulnerability to sin. We recognise we can easily be deceived if we toy with sin and get into a dialogue with the devil, so instead we are firm and decisive.

May we so love and believe the Word of God that, as Paul put it, we give no place to the devil.