

Satan: Who is He?

by Dr. J. Vernon McGee



Published and distributed by
Thru the Bible Radio Network
P.O. Box 7100
Pasadena, California 91109-7100
(800) 65-BIBLE
www.ttb.org

Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Bible*.
(This message is also included in the hardback book, *Doctrine for Difficult Days*,
Copyright © 1996 by Thru the Bible Radio.)

This is one theme that I approach with mixed feelings. I want to avoid any superstitious and non-biblical conceptions because there's so much abroad today concerning Satan that is not biblical. Yet I want to be realistic about it. I believe that Satan is a reality. He is a person, and I am convinced that he would like very much to see you skip this message. I've prayed more about the preparation of this study than any other in a long time because of that.

He is an enemy. I have never spoken on the subject of Satan when there wasn't something which interrupted in a way that tried to snatch away the seed of the Word that was sown. One thing is obvious: Satan does not want to be identified. Ignorance of his motives and his movements is his chief weapon today. He moves with all subtlety, which is the thing that characterizes him. This is the reason you see him as a serpent in the Garden of Eden. You will see him under different guises as you go through the Word of God. He does this because he does not want his true character to be known. He attempts to conceal that from man.

Let me repeat, ignorance of him is his chief weapon. And if you want to know how well he's done the job, go out on the streets of your neighborhood shopping area and ask the people who go by for their opinions. Probably one out of ten would say they believe Satan is a reality. The other nine will think that he's merely a myth. I say that he has done a superb job of making the average person believe he does not exist.

Paul could write in his day, "We are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11). Well, I do not think we can say that today. The average person *is* ignorant of his devices, and I believe even Christians today are not really on the alert. John says in Revelation 12:9 that Satan "deceives the *whole* world" (emphasis added). He is the one who is in the business of deception, and he has done a marvelous job at that.

Paul told the young preacher Timothy:

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.
(2 Timothy 3:13)

They are going to deceive others because they are themselves the children of Satan, but in turn, they themselves will be deceived. The world outside, as you well know, is carrying on a racket, seeing who can take more advantage of the other, seeing who can deceive the other fellow. That is the satanic system that exists today. Paul, writing to the Corinthian believers and speaking of nonbelievers, said:

... Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Now Satan has done and continues doing a masterful job here. He has blinded the minds of multitudes concerning the gospel. That is the only subject on which he will blind the minds of people. Have you noticed that? The "god of this world," which is another name used for Satan, has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they will not believe the glorious gospel of Christ.

Actually, the human family is said to be imprisoned by Satan, so let's use this as an example. Here is a prison house, and it's absolutely invulnerable, you cannot get out any place. There is no way out except through this door – the Lord Jesus said, "I am the door," you see. The only way you get out is through Christ, and you cannot get out any other way.

Satan has a great many people thinking he is down on skid row. Do you think he is fooling around down there where they can't get out? I don't think so. Some think, *Well, he is out here where sin is flagrant*. No, he is not patrolling those areas – nobody is getting out there. The only place he is watching is the one place of escape, and that is through the gospel of Christ. And the only thing he is concerned about in your neighborhood and my neighborhood is that people be blinded to the gospel of Christ.

My friend, Satan has done a good job. I would estimate that last Sunday from 90 percent of the pulpits of Southern California the congregations were told to *do* something in order to get to heaven. Satan likes that – it's his so-called good news. He uses it in a very convincing manner. That is what he told Adam and Eve. He wanted to convince them that by doing what he said, they could become like God! He is telling folks all over the world, "Don't believe the Bible, you will be able to make it by your own efforts. You can do this yourself. You'll become as gods. Don't take the position that Christ shed His blood in order to redeem you. That's not aesthetic. You don't want this business of the gospel of the Cross." Oh, my friend, there is no other way! Jesus is the only way out, and here is where Satan blinds the human family.

I frankly believe that any preacher or any other person who declares the gospel of Christ is immediately under fire. That person is Satan's enemy. Satan uses every possible means to blind men's eyes to the gospel. He is supreme at this business of deception today.

Angels: Two Classes

First of all, we need to note that angels are divided into two classes, those who are obedient to God and those who belong to Satan. We are given that distinction in Revelation 12:7:

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought.

So we have here good angels and bad angels, God's angels and Satan's angels. And we see Michael who is called the archangel (Jude 9). I personally believe there are other archangels, but as far as we can tell, the holy angels are under Michael. Notice in Revelation 12 that Michael and his angels fought. He is opposed to Satan. Evidently, Satan was an archangel, and when he rebelled against God some unholy angels sided with him. Some of them are already reserved in chains for judgment:

And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.
(Jude 6)

Others of them are called demons, which go about Satan's business. They have not yet been brought to judgment. Why God has made that distinction, I don't know. I suppose there are degrees of responsibility, even among angels, and therefore the responsibility is what made it impossible for some to have any outlet at all. They are reserved in chains.

The Person of Satan

Now when you come to the person of Satan, there are at least forty names given him in Scripture. For instance, you have four names in this one verse in Revelation:

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Revelation 12:9)

Notice that he's called the old serpent; and that, of course, here in the last book of the Bible, takes us back to Satan's first contact with man in the Garden of Eden, for he appeared there as the "shining one." So he is called the old serpent.

He is also called the devil, which is the Greek word *diabolos*, meaning slanderer or accuser. Keep that in mind because it has something to do with his present work, and apparently it also has had something to do with his entire career.

He's also called Satan, which means adversary. He is the awful adversary of God, and he is the adversary of all God's children. We're told:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

Even there, you see three titles given to him.

Satan is called "the accuser of our brethren" in Revelation 12:10. He is called Apollyon in Revelation 9:11, which means destroyer. He is called Belial in 2 Corinthians 6:15, meaning worthless or lawless. He is called "the evil one." You remember that when our Lord taught His disciples to pray, He included "Deliver us from the evil one," which should serve as a warning. And then again Jesus Christ Himself, when He prayed the real Lord's prayer – that is, His own petition to the Father – said:

I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. (John 17:15)

Satan is also called Beelzebub in Mark 3:22, where the scribes accused Christ of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the prince or ruler of the demons.

These are just some of Satan's names and titles. We won't be going into detail concerning them, though it's a very interesting study in and of itself.

Now this creature known as Satan has the unique distinction of being the originator and the promoter of evil. It is a gross assumption and entirely inaccurate to ascribe grotesque physical forms to Satan. Most of what people envision today, for instance, is Satan as a creature with horns, a forked tail, and cloven feet, which comes from the literature of the Middle Ages. Its origin is Greek mythology and is the description of the god Pan, or Bacchus, the god of pleasure. All of this has shaped the thinking of Christendom concerning Satan more than the Bible has, and it's well to get back to the Word of God and see what God really has to say about him.

Satan is a personality, definitely a personality. You will remember that our Lord, addressing the scribes and Pharisees, said:

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. (John 8:44)

This is the way Scripture speaks of Satan. Note that our Lord refers to him definitely as a person, a liar, and a murderer.

Let me repeat this verse:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

“Satan,” someone has said, “is to be dreaded as a lion; he is more to be dreaded as a serpent; and he is most to be dreaded as an angel.” That’s the difficulty. We think of him as being a frightful, fearful being. But he was not created a frightful creature. In fact, 2 Corinthians 11:14 tells us that Satan “transforms himself into an angel of light,” and if you could see him, you would agree that he is the most beautiful creature you’ve ever seen. One of the reasons sin is attractive is because Satan is attractive. The idea that he represents the seamy side of life is not true. He’s very much concerned about the things of culture and refinement. He is right in the midst of the things that today are considered the best things in life. You do not have to go down to skid row to find him at work.

The Origin of Satan

Let’s turn back to the Old Testament and see the origin of this evil one. The passage that deals with this is Ezekiel 28. It is a remarkable revelation, and I want us to look at this carefully because here we have the origin of this evil creature.

In this passage, beginning with verse 11, we see Satan behind the king of Tyre. Tyre was the great commercial center. Tyre represents the final Babylon, which God will destroy because it is satanic. Notice this:

Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him”

The things that follow could never apply to a human king of Tyre, but they do apply to the one who is behind him. This angel is the highest creature God ever created.

Notice what God Himself says about Satan:

Thus says the Lord GOD: “You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” (v. 12)

Satan was the wisest creature God ever created. No other angel, no other being, was ever created with the intelligence that God gave to this one. He was the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. And when God says “perfect in beauty,” I can’t even imagine what that would be. This creature is today the highest being this side of God. And, thank God, he is not God but

only a creature. It would be frightful if he were anything but a creature. However, as a creature compared to you and me, we are no match for him at all.

Billy Sunday made quite an issue of “fighting the devil.” But, of course, even Billy Sunday knew he could not fight the devil. You and I cannot fight him. We are told to *resist* him. And in Ephesians 6 we’re told to put on the whole armor of God and to *stand*, as we shall see. We are never told to fight. He could overcome you or me at any moment he wanted to. Were it not for the grace of God, you and I would be absolutely crushed by him. I have a notion he has more to do with your life than you think he does. He has plenty to do with the lives of believers because he hates believers. By the way, communism certainly must have been spawned in the very atmosphere of Satan, for it’s so much like his methods.

Now will you notice the things that are said concerning Satan in Ezekiel 28: “You were in Eden, the garden of God.” This is not the Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve were in, although Satan had also been there, but this is a different kind of Eden.

You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone [was] your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold

Stop there for a moment. These jewels are found in only two other places: They are in the garments of the high priest, in his breastplate (Exodus 28:15-20), and you’ll find them garnishing the foundations of the walls in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:18-21). Here in Ezekiel we see this creature covered with all of these precious stones representing that which is highest and *heavenly*.

This gives you some concept of his beauty. And notice this:

The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. (v. 13)

He was created an instrument of music, if you please! He didn’t carry around a musical instrument, he *was* a musical instrument – perhaps like a mighty pipe organ. Now can you imagine that kind of music, my friend, compared with some of the things we hear in our day that are classified as music? Can you imagine the effect that this creature would have upon all of God’s intelligences? He is a walking symphony, and he is perfect in wisdom and perfect in beauty!

That’s not all – “You were the anointed cherub” (v. 14). So you see that we’re not talking about a man. The word cherub is the singular of cherubim. Cherubim are symbolic of God’s holy presence and unapproachable majesty. They are celestial beings who guard and vindicate the righteousness of God. Satan was one of the cherubim. Now whether there were others equal to him, I don’t know. I assume that all the cherubim are on the same par, but this one – “You were the anointed cherub who covers” – occupied a unique position.

Now, “the anointed cherub who covers” is the picture given to us in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve had been sent out of the garden, and God placed the cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life. They were protecting that way of life so that man could come to God, so he would not be destroyed by the holiness of God nor be judged by God. And further on in history, when Moses made the mercy seat and placed it in the tabernacle’s Holy of Holies, God’s glory dwelt between the cherubim. The cherubim covered it (see Exodus 25:20).

Satan was a cherub. And his position was to guard the very throne of God in heaven. He looked down upon it as those cherubim looked down upon the mercy seat in the tabernacle. His position was that of protecting the holiness of God. Satan had occupied this highest of all positions!

And will you notice:

You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. (v. 14)

This is an Eden, not of green grass and trees and animals, but of stones, *beautiful* stones, if you please.

Now notice this very interesting verse:

You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. (v. 15)

Imagine this highest of God's creatures, perfect in wisdom, beautiful beyond description – there is no way in the world for us today as human beings to conceive of the beauty of this creature – given this high, exalted position, and a musician to top off all that!

But this creature with all of these attributes also had a free will. God had created him, as He did the angels, with a free will – these created intelligences could make a choice. One day God said to this marvelous creature, “Iniquity was found in you.”

What Did He Do?

What kind of iniquity could be found in him? Was he going out at night and getting drunk? What was this covering cherub doing? In the Book of Ezekiel God has let us stand with Him at the very beginning, to see the origin, the creation of Satan. But in the Book of Isaiah God lets us see his character.

Now let's look at this creature. What was it he did? What was his sin when iniquity was found in him? He must have done something horrible! Do you suppose he murdered? We could get the FBI on the case and find out if he's guilty of murder or kidnapping or something like that. But, friends, he's not guilty of those things.

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! (Isaiah 14:12)

He's an angel of light. He is Lucifer. When the sons of God shouted for joy at the creation, Satan was there to shout for joy also, the hypocrite! He was a liar from the beginning. Oh, that same thing is in the human heart. Will you notice it?

How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! (Isaiah 14:12)

He weakens the nations. He is certainly weakening America today! Now we are going to find out his iniquity. Notice his five “I wills” here:

For you have said in your heart: “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest

sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High. (Isaiah 14:13, 14)

“I will go down to *hell*.” What? Is that what he said? That’s not the direction he wants to go! If you think he’s interested in hell, you are wrong. He hasn’t been there yet, and he doesn’t want to go there. He will resist it until the very end. What he actually said was, “I will ascend into *heaven*.” He is mighty interested in that direction.

Listen to his second “I will”: “I will exalt my throne above the stars of God – I am going to take over.” After all, he is perfect in wisdom and beauty. He has a tremendous following, and he’s done some snooping around. Oh, the human heart is like Satan! I suppose he began by stirring up discontent among the angels, approaching them like this: “How do you feel about the way things are being run here? Are you satisfied with your job? Wouldn’t you like to have a higher position? Don’t you think that you’re being a little excluded?” That is the tactic Satan used with Adam and Eve.

Now you may not believe that such a thing could be done in heaven. Well, human beings do that, and they do it right in the church. Anyone on a church staff can tell you about that. Sometimes somebody will take a member of the church staff out to lunch and in the course of the conversation ask, “How do you feel about the pastor?” He is seeing if he can run a wedge in between the pastor and the church staff.

You know, Satan is really clever. He gets into the churches – in fact, he goes to church every Sunday and he majors in sowing discord. He may cause you to feel neglected and unappreciated. Oh, how subtle that is. And how satanic it is! That is a lie that began in heaven among the angels – maybe something like this: “Wouldn’t you like to have a better position? I’m thinking about setting up a little kingdom of my own, and I’ve got you in mind for prime minister. God hasn’t given you the chance here that He should have given you. You were created for something better, yet He won’t give it to you, and I don’t know why He doesn’t. But I’ll give it to you. I’m making plans to lead a rebellion. Would you like to come with me?”

Again, how subtle! Some of the angels fell for that! You say, “How could intelligent angels fall for that?” Well, I know intelligent human beings today who fall for the same thing! It’s satanic, my friend, and this thing does get into the church.

You know, we think the devil is at work when people get into sin, gross sin, or get drunk or steal something. No! They sit in the pew as pious as you please, and they sow seeds of rebellion. That’s satanic, that’s the way he moves. And you’re no better than they are if you listen to them, because the angels who listened to Satan went with him. And in the Book of Revelation we are told that Satan took a third of the angels with him when he rebelled. Think of that! A lot of them felt they could get by with it.

Now you may think that Satan’s tactics do not work. They worked in the Garden of Eden. And you think they don’t work today? You go to the smart men you know, the ones with the high I.Q.s, and they will tell you that they are smart enough to get what they want by themselves – they don’t need God. It is the lie of Satan today that you can work out your own salvation, that you’re smarter than anyone’s given you credit for. All of us want a status symbol of some sort, and we all like to feel that we really are somebody. But when God saves you, He takes you as a nobody. And that’s the reason it’s not the popular way today. But, friends, it is God’s way.

Notice again the “I wills” of Satan. Oh, this is subtle, it’s satanic:

For you have said in your heart: “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest

sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.” (Isaiah 14:13, 14)

What? The devil did not want to be the devil, he wanted to be *God!* “I will be like the Most High.” But still a great many people think that the devil wants to be the devil. He does not. That’s why he led a rebellion against God. And that’s the thing he told Adam and Eve – “You will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). There are a lot of people who believe that they are good enough for God’s heaven. Well, that’s Satan’s lie, my friend! They have no notion of what the holiness of God is.

Now in the final analysis, what is sin? We have seen the entrance of sin through Satan. He was setting his will against the will of God. *Anything* that is contrary to the will and character of God is sin. Murder is sin, not just because God says it is, but because it is contrary to the will and character of God.

Satan said in substance, “I’m not interested in this job of being the covering cherub. I know I’m the highest creature, but after all, I think I’m pretty enough and I’m wise enough and I’m smart enough and I’m good enough to be God. And I want to be God!” That’s what he said to the Lord Jesus in Matthew 4:9, “If you fall down and worship me, I’ll give You all the kingdoms of the world.” That’s what he wants and what he is after.

Oh, that’s what so many people are after today – position, power, prestige, status. Things of the world system. Imagine little, puffed-up creature-man who says to God, “I won’t do what You want me to do. I am going to do it *my way.*” That is exactly what man is saying today. Well, friend, you are not going to do things your way, because God’s will is going to prevail in the final analysis.

Therefore, the prayer of all God’s people should be “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Anything contrary to His will is sin, regardless of what it is.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12)

Mankind sets his will against the will of God.

The will of God is coming down through this world and through His universe like a tremendous steamroller. And any creature that gets in the way of the will of God will be crushed, because God’s will must prevail. And anything contrary to that is sin. The sin of Satan was that he set his will against the will of God.

All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way. (Isaiah 53:6)

That’s what sin is, basically. What is it that you want above everything else? “My way.” Isn’t that right? That’s all that a human being wants – my way. Oh, my friend, you and I are sinners as long as we put our will against the will of God.

Now will you notice this: The cosmos, the earth, is the place where Satan today has control, and he does have charge of it. When he rebelled against God, he no longer occupied his position, but that’s all he has lost. Satan has access to heaven today, as the Book of Job reveals. We find him going into the presence of God, and not an angel turned and said, “What are you doing here?” Nobody said, “You have no business here.” He went there because he had a right to be there.

Not only does he have the right to be there, God may give him the right to test us. Our Lord said to Peter in Luke 22:31, “Satan has desired to have you that he might test you.” Satan followed the same pattern he had used in Job’s case. He went into God’s presence and said, “Does Job fear You for nothing? That fellow Job, just give me a chance at him and I will show You that I can make him curse You to Your face!” (Job 1:9-11). And he got a chance at him, if you please. It was terrible what he did to Job.

When the apostle Peter was a target, I think Satan said to the Lord, “You take that fellow Simon Peter. Do You mean to tell me You’ve called him as an apostle? I know him as well as You know him. I’ve been watching him, and I can wreck him if You’ll just let me get to him.” And God permitted it. God said, “I’ll let you have him, but only for a little while.” Believe me, the time Peter was in the hands of Satan, he certainly was sifted, sifted like grain, was he not? And the experience was tragic for Simon Peter. Satan made him do a dastardly thing – deny his Lord, a thing that he regretted the rest of his life, of course.

His Influence in the Cosmos

Satan apparently lost this earth, but he gained it back when man fell. And he is called, if you please, “the god of this world.” He’s the prince of this world. You may recall how Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry, was tempted or tested by Satan:

Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory, for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.” (Luke 4:5-7)

The fall of man was Satan’s gain. He gained the dominion that man lost, so that he is the prince of this world in which we live. Now when we say the *world*, we’re not talking about the soil down here, although there’s a curse upon it. Terra firma is not Satan’s. The world we’re talking about is a system, a cosmos, and that is the word used in Scripture. I want to bundle together a whole lot of Scriptures that I hope will help you see what we’re talking about now. The cosmos is that which Satan controls today.

Our Lord Jesus said:

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler [the prince] of this world will be cast out. (John 12:31)

Jesus was looking to the future there, but regarding the prince of this world, this cosmos, Jesus said:

I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler [the prince] of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. (John 14:30)

The prince of this world is Satan.

And John 16:11 says the Holy Spirit will convict the world “of judgment, because the ruler [prince] of this world is judged.”

Satan is called the prince of the power of the air. He is also called the god of this world.

To the church in Pergamos the Lord Jesus says, “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is” (Revelation 2:13). Satan reigns on this earth today. He controls the system that is known as the world system. But our Lord also says:

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

And 1 John 5:19 says:

We know that we are of God, and the whole world [the cosmos] lies under the sway of the wicked one.

In other words, the whole world lies asleep in the lap of the wicked one. And today, this world system is under the control of Satan. That’s the reason countries can’t have peace. That’s the reason the United Nations is not effective. That’s the reason for the turmoil on the face of the earth right now. Few of our world rulers today take Satan into consideration, although some have done so in the past. The thing that made certain statesmen in England great is the fact that in their day they not only believed in God and believed in Christ and trusted Him, but they also believed that the devil was a reality, in control of this world system, and that he must be taken into consideration.

Will you notice the admonition of James 4:4:

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

First John 5:4 says: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world [the world system].” The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world [Satan] is coming” (John 14:30). And 1 John 4:3:

And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world [system].

Oh my, there are so many other Scriptures regarding this world system.

My friend, what I am going to say now applies to wherever you live, but I’ll use Los Angeles as an example. Southern California is a lovely place, but how do you as a Christian look on it? We have fine museums and art galleries in Southern California. There are wonderful places of culture and refinement and great seats of education. How do you look at those? I am saying this carefully now: All of that is part of the cosmos, a world system under Satan’s control. And all of that is *judged*. God has condemned it, and it will be going down with Satan when he goes down. How do you look upon it? So many Christians think, *If I just don’t do this and I don’t do a few other little things, that makes me a nice, spiritual Christian*, when in reality you may be as worldly as you can be, and Satan is leading you around by the nose. Why? Because of your attitude and relationship to this world system that we’re in today. Paul says we should live like this:

... those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess. (1 Corinthians 7:30)

“Those who weep, as though they did not weep.” Are you going to let some sorrow, some tragedy in your life keep you from serving God? “Those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice.” Are you going to let pleasure take the place of your relationship to God, as many do? “Those who buy as though they did not possess.” Will you let your business take the place of God? Many a man has made business his god. Paul continues:

... and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away. (v. 31)

We're in it.

As a pastor I once walked all over Nashville, Tennessee, with a visiting evangelist, because he would not eat where they served beer. So we walked and then drove up one street and down another, and we could not find a place open. Finally we found one, and I said, “Now look here, brother, I'm hungry, you're hungry, I don't drink beer, I hope you don't drink beer, let's go in and eat!” This business today of thinking, *Well, if I just don't do this or that, I am a spiritual person*. Oh, that makes us nothing in the world but spiritual snobs – not even knowing what this world system is.

How do you look upon things of this world? Suppose tonight the city of Los Angeles would go up in smoke – and it may very well go up in smoke! Would it break your heart? Are you so wrapped up in this world system, in your business, and in your social life that, if it all were taken out from under you as a Christian today, your heart would be broken? God have mercy on you, because it's going to be taken away from you someday. It is going to disappear. Paul says these things are passing away, and God is going to judge them. And when God judges Satan, it includes all of this world system.

His Influence in Spiritual Warfare

My friend, you and I are in a war, in a conflict, and we are given these instructions. This is mentioned to us at least three times, by the way: Ephesians 6:11 – get your armor on and keep it on! James 4:7 – submit to God before you try to resist the devil. And 1 Peter 5:8 – be watchful because the enemy is stalking you like a hungry lion!

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

Can you overcome it? No, you can't. You and I are no match for it today. What are we to do? Well, we as believers are given detailed instructions as to what we're to do. We are to “put on the whole armor of God.” To fight? No sir, not to fight, because you and I are not going to be able to fight. He says, “And having done all, to stand.”

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6:13)

There is a demonic world around us and it is manifesting itself at the present hour. If I had said this when I was a young preacher, many would not have believed it. Or they would have said as did one dear lady, “Dr. McGee, you sound positively spooky.” Today, however, demonism is a popular subject and is plainly exhibited. There is a Church of Satan in many of our cities. There are strange things happening within certain of these weird, way-out groups. A man said to me recently, “Dr. McGee, this thing is real today.” Who said it wasn’t real? If you are an unbeliever in this area, open your eyes and see what is happening about us. People are being ensnared and led into all kinds of demonism. There are spiritual forces working in the world, evil forces working against the church. They are working against the believer, against God, against Christ.

We have the enemy located and identified. The enemy is spiritual. It is Satan who heads up his demonic forces. Now we need to recognize where the battle is. Paul identifies the arsenal that is available for the defense. Nowhere is the believer urged to attack and advance. The key to this entire section in Ephesians is the phrase “to stand.”

This is an hour when my heart is sick as I see the attendance way down and the interest gone in churches that at one time were great churches. The members were blind to the fact that a battle was being fought there, a spiritual battle.

Winning the War

Do you pray for your pastor on Saturday night? Don’t criticize him, but rather *pray* for him. He needs your prayers. The devil gives him enough opposition. You don’t need to join the crowd that crucifies the man who is preaching the Word of God. You ought to uphold his hands as Aaron and Hur upheld the hands of Moses on behalf of Israel. My heart goes out to pastors who are in need of congregations who will stand with them.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.
(Ephesians 6:14, 15)

“Stand therefore.” This is the fourth time Paul has given this exhortation to the believer. This is the only place that I find him laying it on the line and speaking like a sergeant. Earlier he said, “I beseech you,” but now he gives the command to stand. Not only are we to be in a standing position, but we are also to have on certain armor to protect ourselves. We are not to be outwitted by the wiles of the devil; we are to be ready for his attacks.

“Having girded your waist with truth.” In the ancient garment of that day, the girdle about the waist or loins held in place every other part of the uniform of the soldier. It was essential. To tell you the truth, if the girdle was lost, you lost everything. The garments would fly open and the pants would fall down. We see this routine in comedies, and people laugh to see a man trying to run or fight with his trousers drooping. It looks funny in a comedy routine, but it is not funny in a battle. We are told to be girded with truth in the face of the enemy. Truth is that which holds everything together. What is that truth? It is the Word of God. We need people to give out the Word of God and to give it out just as it is written. We need people whose loins are girt about with truth. They need to *know* the Word of God. We often hear preaching coming from folks who are standing there about to lose all their spiritual garments! They are not girded about with truth, which is the Word of God.

Every piece of this armor really speaks of Christ. We are in Christ in the heavenlies, and we should put on Christ down here in our earthly walk. Paul has already told us to put on Christ, the One who is the truth, and we should be diligent to put Him on in our lives.

Any testimony that does not glorify Jesus Christ should not be given. There are too many testimonies that glorify self. Jesus didn't get very much when He got you, and He didn't get very much when He got me. This is a day when the little fellow really does not have very much to say. We get the impression that we need to be someone great in the eyes of the world. But what we need is to have our loins girt about with truth so that we can give a testimony that glorifies Christ. Christ is the truth. Truth alone can meet error.

"Having put on the breastplate of righteousness." Christ is the righteousness of the believer. I do think, however, that it includes the practical righteousness of the believer. Let's be clear that the filthy rags of self-righteousness are useless as a breastplate, but I do think that underneath there should be a heart and a conscience that are right with God. Only the righteousness of Christ can enable the believer to stand before men and before God, but the heart that is to be protected should be a heart that is clean before the Lord. It is an awful condition to have sin in our lives while we are trying to carry on the battle. We can never win it that way.

"Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." Shoes are necessary for standing. They speak of the foundation. We need a good, solid foundation, and preparation is foundational. I remember in hand-to-hand combat we were taught to make sure our feet were anchored. Are your feet anchored on the Rock? Christ is your foundation in this world. We are to put on Christ. Oh, how we need Him today as we face a gainsaying world and spiritual wickedness in the darkness of this world!

Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:16-18)

The armor of the believer is a spiritual armor because we fight against a spiritual enemy. We are to stand in that armor, and that armor is Christ, the living Christ. Satan himself, in the Book of Job, describes how God protects His own. He said:

Have You not made a hedge around him [Job], around his household and around all that he has on every side? (Job 1:10)

God has provided protection for us today in the armor He supplies.

"Above all, [take] the shield of faith." The shield covered all of the armor. The shield referred to is a large shield the size of a door. It was the shield of Greece's heavy infantry. A soldier stood behind it and was fully protected. Christ is both the door to salvation and the door that protects the believer from the enemy without. This is the picture in John, chapter 10. Christ is both salvation and security.

Faith enables us to enter the door:

I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. (John 10:9)

That is salvation. What about security? Faith places us securely in His hands. Faith also enables us to stand behind that shield which will quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

“The fiery darts of the wicked one.” He is shooting them fast and furiously. I remember that when I was in college, I had a brilliant philosophy professor who had studied in Germany. I respected his intellect, although I did not realize at the time that he was intellectually dishonest. I looked up to him but, very frankly, he was taking my feet out from under me. I would try to answer him in class when I probably should have kept my mouth shut. But we became friends, and we used to walk together across the campus after class and discuss the questions I had raised. It became clear that his philosophies opposed the Word of truth. Discouraged, I came to the place where I went to the Lord in prayer and said, “Lord, if I can’t believe Your Word, I don’t want to go into the ministry.” Then the Lord in a very miraculous way sent me to hear a man who was the most brilliant man, I think, I have ever heard. He gave me truthful answers to my questions. Then I began to learn that when a fiery dart comes my way and I do not have the answer, I am to put up the shield of faith. And this is what I have been doing ever since. I have found that the shield of faith has batted down the fiery darts of the wicked one.

The fiery darts come fast and furiously, and they are going to continue to come. The only thing that will bat them down is the shield of faith. It is like a big door. The hoplites, the heavily armed soldiers in the Greek infantry, could move with those tremendous shields, put them out in front of them, and stand protected shoulder to shoulder while the enemy shot everything they had at them. When the enemy was out of ammunition, the hoplites would move in, certain of victory. That is the way to stand against the fiery darts of the evil one.

“And take the helmet of salvation.” The helmet protects the head, and God does appeal to the mind of man. I recognize that He appeals to the heart, but God also appeals to the intellect. Throughout the Scriptures God urges man to think, for example:

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” (Isaiah 1:18)

Paul mentions this helmet in connection with salvation again in another epistle.

But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. (1 Thessalonians 5:8)

All the parts of the armor mentioned so far have been for defense. Have you noticed that? Everything is for the front of the individual. There is no protection for his back; nothing is provided for retreat. Believe me, a retreating Christian is certainly open season for the enemy; the enemy can get through to him.

Now we have two weapons for offense. The first one is the Word of God, called “the sword of the Spirit.” Christ is the living Word of God. He used the Word of God to meet Satan in the hour of His temptation. Out of His mouth goes a sharp, two-edged sword in the Battle of Armageddon (see Revelation 1:16 and 19:21). He gains the victory with that sword. What is it? It is the Word of God. We need that sharp sword going out of our mouths today. The Word of God is a powerful weapon of offense. You and I are to use it.

Our second weapon of offense is prayer – “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” Praying in the Holy Spirit is not turning in a grocery list to God. It means that you

and I recognize our enemy and that we lay hold of God for spiritual resources. We lay hold of God for that which is spiritual, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God. Paul here distinguishes between prayer and supplication. Prayer is general; supplication is specific. All effective prayer must be in the Spirit.

If you are able to stand firm in this world today, that's all God is asking you to do. He is not asking you to fight the devil. He is not asking you to do some great thing. He is only asking you to stand. Remember the prayer of our Lord in John 17:15, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one."

I never get through a day that I don't get home and get in bed and say, "Thank You, Lord, for getting me by the devil's trap again today." My friend, Satan is setting a trap for you and me all the time, and he's attempting to ensnare us. In this hour in which we live it is tragic to see many true believers being taken in by him in many subtle and unsuspecting ways. We ought not to be ignorant of his devices. We need to put on God's complete armor. We need to be on the alert, because Satan is loose in the world today.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

If you think Satan will show mercy to you, you are dead wrong. If he gets you in a corner, my friend, and if you leave off the armor of God, he'll destroy you in a minute. And he has destroyed many good men. He can ruin your testimony. He can absolutely ruin your life if you don't wear the whole armor of God so that you might be able to stand.

I'm afraid that Christians today take life a little too lightly and easily. You know, our forefathers thought life was serious. And they thought how they lived was very important. And, my friend, they did not crack up like we're cracking up today. What is it that's happening in this world right now? It's impossible to explain what is happening in every country right now, apart from this creature.

Thank God, Satan will be judged someday. God's going to get rid of him. God's going to destroy him. God's going to put him in the lake of fire. But in the meantime he is at this moment your greatest enemy, and he is my greatest enemy. He will do everything in the world to wreck and ruin us. In this world we are in his system. He is running this world today. He's the one who is back of the nations of the world. He is the one who is bringing the misery and the heartbreak to this dark world today. And the interesting thing is, the world doesn't even believe he exists. Boy, is he smart! I take my hat off to his ability. I respect him, and I'm afraid of him.

I want to flee to the One who can *keep* me. The Epistle of James admonishes us:

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

You had better submit yourself to God *before* you start resisting the devil! I tell you, if you're not out and out for God today, Satan has *got* you. And that's the reason he catches so many cold and indifferent church members. Why do the cults send out their people to knock on doors on Sunday morning? Because they know that careless, indifferent church members are at home. And the devil knows they are the ones he can get, and he snares them – boy, does he snare them! Satan does not necessarily ask you to go out and get drunk. He asks you to become very religious – but don't come to Christ, and don't trust His death on the cross for your salvation, and don't

even acknowledge that you *need* the Lord Jesus Christ! Just try to be a big old boy yourself – and are you in for a fall!

Oh, my friend, if we could only be wise enough to place our faith in what God says and use God's Word to guide us through this life!

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)