

## The Schemes of the Devil

*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*

Ephesians 6:11

Although Ephesians 6 is mostly known for its presentation of the armor of God, the Apostle Paul prefaces the armor with verses 10-13, which describe the overall nature of the war around us. Although we are studying these four verses over the course of four sermons, we are moving through them in a more topical fashion. We began last week by focusing upon verse 12, *for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places*. We chose to begin by discussing our enemy precisely because our study of the commands to be strong, stand firm, and put on the whole armor of God will be filled with greater significance once we properly understand against whom we are fighting. Fittingly, we continue that very theme by backing up to verse 11 and focusing upon the phrase *against the schemes of the devil*. Thus, having established the nature of our enemy, we turn now to study his methods of attack.

### SATAN & HIS GOAL

As we discussed previously, the primary enemy warring against us during our pilgrimage to heaven are Satan and his unfallen angels (also known as demons). To these Paul gave a fourfold description of power and authority, emphasizing that they are not relatively harmless spirits of mischief that only seek to make life slightly more difficult for us; instead, they are otherworldly beings with a strength that greatly exceeds our own. As one writes notes, Paul is purposely presenting this fight as “an unequal contest.” He continues to conclude:

The choice is not whether you will be a Christian soldier or a Christian civilian but whether you will be a prepared Christian soldier or an unprepared one. And an unprepared soldier of flesh and blood will not be able to stand against the scale of the spiritual forces ranged against him or her.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, Paul is aiming to awaken us to imminent dangers lurking all about us. To borrow one of Piper’s metaphors, we often live as though life were a cruise ship, while in reality we are on board a warship. We must be sober minded regarding the great threats around us.

Yet to further elaborate about our enemy consider the interesting similarity and difference of wording between verses 11 and 12. First, we should note that both are constructed in the same manner. Verse 11 calls us to stand *against the schemes of the devil*, while verse 12 explains our enemy further by describing them as rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil that we are wrestling against. Thus, while explicitly referring to the same enemy, verse 11 is singular

---

<sup>1</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *The Whole Armor of God: How Christ’s Victory Strengthens Us for Spiritual Warfare*, 12.

(the devil) while verse 12 is plural (rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces). Is our enemy, therefore, one or many? The answer is, I believe, yes.

Jesus received a similarly puzzling answer from a demon-possessed man in Mark 5 whenever He demanded to know the demon's name. It replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many" (Mark 5:9). The shift from singular to plural seems to indicate that an entire host of demons were grouped together and acting as a single unit under one name, Legion. Likewise, Paul clearly means his usage of *the devil* not to be limited to Satan himself but to apply to the entire demonic host. Indeed, this seems to be a pattern in Scripture where Satan is spoken of in as a singular threat as though all the demons were simply an aspect of him. Yet I think this distinction is important to understand for a couple of reasons, none which we have the time to discuss in detail, yet still are worth mentioning.

First, Satan truly could be described as the antigod. While God delights in working through His servants (whether human or angelic), He preserves their distinction from Himself. As in the example of John in Revelation 19 attempting to worship an angel, the angel did not presume to receive worship on God's behalf but instead gladly affirmed himself as a fellow servant and redirected the worship to God. Or, as we have noted before, while we are in Christ, we will never *become* Christ. We very much remain ourselves, and as when we are fully united to Him, we will certainly become more fully ourselves rather than less. Satan, on the other hand, cannot bear this distinction. Having denied the most basic distinction between Creator and creation, he can only continue to blur and blend all other distinctions. Thus, it should not surprise us that demons seem to be spoken of as if they were extensions of Satan himself. Satan, though powerful, is not sovereign; therefore, he cannot truly empower others; he can only absorb into himself.

Second, Satan uses his demonic host acting as extensions of himself to give the illusion of divinity. Again, the devil is not divine; he is a created being as we and the angels all are. Thus, while he is not omnipresent, he can appear to be in all places through all of his evil spirits working on his behalf.

Third, some may take small comfort in being small enough Christians to escape the eyeline of Satan directly. Yet this is no comfort that the Scriptures give us. Yes, although we could each logically assume that we have never met the direct temptation of Satan himself, his demons still work in his name so that our warnings to be watchful and resist the devil are highly important for us to heed.

But now that we have added a bit more to our discussion on the nature of Satan, we can proceed to the topic at hand, the schemes of the devil. The Greek word for *schemes* here is origin of the English word *method*. Or those more familiar with the King James Version likely have the phrase "the *wiles* of the devil" sealed within their memory. The word *wiles* is quite fitting, though unfortunately archaic in the present day. The Wily Coyote from Looney Tunes immediately comes to mind, and he is called wily because he always has a new plan or scheme for trying to get the Roadrunner. Satan likewise has method after method for achieving his goal, and he is not nearly so comical as the Coyote. Satan is workman, and his schemes are his tools.

But what, we must ask, is he hoping to achieve? What is the goal behind all of his wiles? Satan is the great thief who "comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). If he cannot have God's throne, then he will remove as many from God's presence as he can. If he cannot reign over all creation, then he will corrupt it as thoroughly as possible before his final and permanent imprisonment. Notice, therefore, that his goal has no creativity itself. In fact, evil cannot be truly creative because it can only corrode what God has made. Of course, many are quite clever in

discovering new ways to sin, yet it is not true creativity, for it is cut off from the Creator Himself. Satan likewise cannot make; therefore, he must steal. He cannot give life; he can only kill. He cannot create but can only destroy. His great goal is, thus, to cause as much pain, suffering, and death as possible, both now and throughout eternity. And unlike many of us, he knows that his time is short (Revelation 12:12), and we can be assured that he is attempting to make best use of his remaining time.

## THE TEMPTER & ACCUSER

With Satan and his ultimate goal now laid out before us, we can discuss some of the schemes that he uses to accomplish his task of stealing, killing, and destroying. If the devil's great aim is our utter destruction, we should very much strive "not to be outwitted by Satan" nor to be "ignorant of his designs" (2 Corinthians 2:11). For this reason, Thomas Brooks counsels us saying,

Beloved in our dearest Lord, Christ, the Scriptures, your own hearts, and Satan's devices, are the four prime things that should be first and more studied and searched. If any cast off the study of these, they cannot be safe here, nor happy hereafter.<sup>2</sup>

What, then, are the schemes of the devil? First, we must note that they all involve one putrid element: sin. Satan's own undoing was sin, and now he seeks to pull as many as possible into the abyss with him. He "has been sinning from the beginning" (1 John 3:8), and all who follow him into sin shape themselves after his likeness. Sin, after all, is lawlessness, specifically the breaking of God's law, and it is sin that ultimately steals, kills, and destroys. Sin stole away the blessings of Eden. Sin brought in the curse of death. And sin will end in eternal destruction within the lake of fire. Even Satan himself will not be spared these consequences of sin; therefore, his only weapon is the very thing that has mortally wounded him. It is as though he is dying of poison and using his final moments to convince others to drink as well. Thus, while sin is Satan's only real tool, he is not its master but its chief slave. John Piper rightly notes that "the only foothold Satan has in your life is your flesh and your sin. Nobody goes to hell because of Satan. The only reason we go to hell is sin."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, he will do everything in his power to cause us to sin.

I agree with William Gurnall's division of the devil's devices into two main categories: temptation and accusation. Through temptation, he attempts to lead us into the act of committing sin, while through accusation he attempts to drive us to despair. These twin tactics also fit with his two titles. As the devil, he is the great adversary, the lawless one who is against God's perfect law. As Satan, he is the accuser who happily ties the guilt and consequences of sin around the neck of the sinner. Gurnall makes a memorable contrast by pointing out that "as the Holy Spirit is first a sanctifier and then a comforter, so Satan is first a tempter, then a troubler."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as sanctification and comfort are bound together, so too are temptation and accusation. If we cannot do one, he will most certainly attempt the other. Yet perhaps the best way of understanding these schemes would be to analyze a few case studies within Scripture. Throughout the Bible, we are given three moments of Satan's speech being recorded.

We find the first of these events in Genesis 3:1-7:

---

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, xxix.

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, *Declare War on Sin*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/declare-war-on-sin>

<sup>4</sup> William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 96.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Moses rightly begins by noting the craftiness of the serpent, for when presenting his temptation, he did not immediately suggest eating the fruit. He instead came under the guise of simply asking his human rulers for clarification regarding the command of God, yet the very nature of that question worked to plant the seed of doubting God’s goodness in Eve’s mind. It is then only after Satan witnesses Eve adding “neither shall you touch it” to God’s Word that he explicitly sets himself against God’s law.

Causing us to doubt the goodness of God remains one of Satan’s chief strategies to this day. After all, once we begin to distrust God’s kindness toward us, we can be led into almost any sin. As Eve was brought to believe that God was withholding something gloriously good from her, we can also buy the lie that God keeps us from some pleasures simply as because He can rather than for our own good.

Next, we read of Satan’s accusation of Job before God in Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-7:

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD...

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him

to destroy him without reason.” Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

Within these passages, we primarily see Satan as the accuser (which is the very meaning of the title Satan). He accuses Job before God of not possessing true piety, of serving God only because the LORD has blessed him thoroughly. I believe that Satan’s accusation does look a bit different for us today, though his plan remains the same. Revelation 12:10-12 seems to describe Satan’s eviction from heaven, and it presents it as presumably occurring at some point during Jesus’ first coming:

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

In that text, the voice from heaven describes Satan as “the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God,” which seems to be exactly what Satan did with Job. However, Revelation 12 seems to be describing a shift in circumstances. Now that Christ is seated at the Father’s right hand as our great High Priest and Mediator, the Accuser no longer has a case to bring against us before the Father; he has now been cast down. His accusations, however, have not ceased; rather, he brings them to us directly. If he cannot snatch us from the Father’s hand (and he certainly cannot!), he will at least make us as miserable and ineffective as possible. He will constantly bring our sin before our eyes, but not as the Holy Spirit convicts to lead us to repentance, rather he will heap the condemnation of our sins upon us until we are given over to despair or throw ourselves headlong into legalism for a false comfort.

Finally, we read of Jesus’ temptation by Satan in Matthew 4:1-11 (we could similarly read Luke’s account in 4:1-13):

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written,

“‘Man shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

“‘He will command his angels concerning you,’

and

“On their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

“You shall worship the Lord your God  
and him only shall you serve.”

Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

There is far more to learn from this passage than we have time to discuss presently, so let us point out a few notable lessons. First, we can observe that while the Holy Spirit sent Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, Satan alone was the tempter. The Spirit led our Lord into a trial, and that trial was the devil’s temptation. Thus, while God orchestrates even the workings of Satan according to His sovereign will, He does not tempt us toward sin.

Second, notice that Satan came to Christ after His forty days of fasting, and he first appealed to Jesus’ bodily hunger. He is always looking for the proper opportunity to strike with temptation, and times when our flesh is weak are particularly ripe for sin. Even still, we should not think that Satan only uses times of weakness to attack since he came to Eve within Paradise and to Job at the height of his wealth. There should never, therefore, be a moment when we think ourselves to be free from the Tempter’s allure of sin.

Third, Satan’s second and third temptations were appeals to fame and glory. Appealing to Scripture, he tempted Jesus to throw Himself from the top of the temple. Like the first temptation, the devil veiled this as a means of proving Jesus’ identity as the Son of God. When that temptation also failed, he tempted Jesus with all the kingdoms of the earth, to have take His rightful kingship but bypass the cross. Satan, likewise, may tempt us through misused Scripture, which especially comes through the false teachers that he has captured in this snare. Very often, these false teachers bring the very same sort of temptations that we see here. Prosperity teachers, for example, frequently misuse Scripture to encourage people to demand their healing or prosperity from God, which is a form of putting the LORD to the test. They also, through their emphasis upon health and wealth, line up with Satan’s third temptation by promising the glories of heaven here rather than the cross that Christ commanded us to carry.

Fourth, we should note Jesus’ reliance upon the Scriptures. He stood strong in the face of temptation, but He stood in the strength of the Spirit through the very Word that His Father had spoken. God’s Word is the only proper weapon to defend us against the assaults of the devil, and prayer is the means by which God Himself strengthens us to endure Satan’s wiles. Therefore, as we saw in Genesis 3, Satan will do everything possible to cause you to neglect God’s Word and prayer. Whether through busyness or the pride of self-reliance or mere laziness, we are never less secure and he is never more threatening than when we are not in loving communion with our Father through prayer and the Word.

Do not, therefore, neglect these “simple” actions. Although we may desire spiritual warfare to look more like a Hollywood blockbuster, the reality is shockingly ordinary. The greatest form of standing against the schemes of the devil is to delight in God’s law, making your meditation day and night, and to pray always with all perseverance. After all, Jesus’ sacrifice and continuous intercession for us to the Father has given us this blessed communion with the Almighty. Only with our Shepherd by our side are we able to walk through this valley of the shadow of death with no fear of evil or the evil one. Though Satan’s schemes are endless, to this blessed assurance in Christ we hold:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;  
his mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23)