

Basic Christianity
From An Urban Perspective Unit 2
Week 6: What about Satan?

Instructors: We recommend reviewing the “Biography of Satan” reading assignment here, or after the section below titled “Is Satan real?” Ask the students to share what they have learned about who Satan is and how he operates.

Is Satan real?

What do you think? Most people believe in God. We see people doing different things that show they believe that spiritual forces are at work:

- Calling a psychic to connect with a dead relative.
- Putting a voodoo curse on an enemy.
- Engaging in magical practices:
 - ...mixing menstrual blood in food to keep a man faithful to his wife.
 - ...keeping a Bible open in your house and posting a scripture over your door to ward off trouble.

People also believe in “guardian angels” and other supernatural beings like ghosts and spirits. In general, we tend to be superstitious, seeing hidden meaning behind the day-to-day events in our lives.

In a confusing world like this, with all these ideas floating around, it’s important to stay close to scripture. The spiritual realm can be a dangerous place. Our only safe guide for interacting with spiritual forces in the world is the Bible.

Most folks think it is okay to be spiritual, but the presumption today is, "if it’s spiritual, it’s got to be good." This view is both recent and Western. But according to the bible, some forms of spirituality are dangerous.

Hollywood has sensationalized the devil and demons, to the point where we don’t know what’s true and what isn’t. But the Bible is clear on the existence of Satan and of demons. In fact, the universe is seen as a cosmic *spiritual war zone* between powerful spiritual armies.

“Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.” – 1 Peter 5:8

“For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.” – Ephesians 6:12

As Christians, we align ourselves against a real, powerful enemy. It's important that we understand Satan and what he's up to.

Is belief in Satan just a matter of primitive superstition? There are good reasons to believe in a personal evil spiritual being. God is spirit. We know that he created beings that are both physical and spiritual. Certainly, he could create purely spiritual beings also. Further, we recognize that people can be evil--sometimes extremely evil. So, why couldn't a spiritual being also be evil? It certainly follows from the other points, upon which most people agree. So it is at least reasonable to accept the Bible's

position on the devil. I think we don't like the idea of Satan and we've had our image of him skewed by superstitious and sensational characterizations. We could put it this way: Jesus certainly took Satan seriously.

Spiritual warfare

We, as Christians, are in a battle. Like it or not, we will have to choose sides. This is what Jesus meant when he said,

“Anyone who isn’t with me opposes me, and anyone who isn’t working with me is actually working against me.” – Matthew 12:30

Spiritual warfare centers on who will rule: God or Satan. While the devil has taken rule by deceit and maintains it through lies and corruption, the death of Christ has broken Satan's hold on humanity.

“The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out.” – John 12:31

“In this way, [Jesus] disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.” – Colossians 2:15

We have the promise that one day, God will put an end to the destructive rebellion of the evil one. This is where the church comes in. As the good news of liberation goes out through the church, people once held in Satan’s kingdom are set free.

As soldiers in spiritual war, it is vital that we understand our enemy. He wages war in several ways.

1. Overt Satanic attack.

This is when Satan comes out from behind cover and acts in obvious ways. Primarily we recognize this as demon possession. This is rare, at least in the U.S., though it does happen. See descriptions in Mark 5:1-10 and Acts 19:13-16.

2. Covert Satanic attack.

“The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist.” – Roger ‘Verbal’ Kint in *Usual Suspects*

“Covert” means hidden, as in “covert operation.” Like a master of illusion, Satan prefers to work behind the scenes. We shouldn't expect him to address us with, "Hello, I'm the devil. I'd like to ruin your life!" Mostly the devil would like to distract us away from even considering the reality of spiritual warfare at all. One of the ways he seeks to blind us from his schemes is seduction by the "kosmos.”

In your reading assignment, you read that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” What world is John describing? The Greek word for “world” is “kosmos.” Kosmos is used three different ways in the Bible. It can refer to...

1. The physical earth:

Acts 17: 24 “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

2. Humans that God loves:

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...”

3. A system of values that is opposed to God and designed to lead people away from him:

“Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you.¹⁶ For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world.¹⁷ And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.” – 1 John 2:15-17

This third use of the word kosmos as a system of values is what Satan uses to draw people away from God.

The kosmos is made up of these values:

- a craving for physical *pleasure*
- a craving for everything we *see*
- *pride* in our achievements and possessions

God wants us to enjoy physical pleasures like sex, he wants to give us good things, and he wants us to use our mind and talents to do great things. But sometimes our desires for physical pleasure, or buying something new, or achieving a goal are so strong, they seduce us or distract us away from God. When we find that our resources and most gratifying experiences are caught up in these things, we realize we've been deceived.

Discussion: Where do you see these values coming out in our families and in our community?

Seduction takes opportunity when we are confused about what's really important and what's not. We'll all struggle in these areas. The question is whether we are going with the tide or against it.

Fighting against seduction

Here are several things that seduce or distract people around here from following Christ.

Survival *mentality*:

It's easy to be completely focused on just trying to survive. Every moment is filled with scheming and hustling to get what we need to get by. God promises to take care of us if we put him first by seeking his priorities.

“Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you.” – Matthew 6:33

Part of what consumes folks is an unwillingness to take a stable job. Instead of going to work each day, they're trying to find a way to make a little cash where they can. It may be humbling to take a job at a fast food restaurant, but God wants us to work every day so we can provide and be freed from the survival mentality.

“We must labor, performing with our own hands what is good, so that we will have something to share with one who has need.” – Ephesians 4:28

It's a big life adjustment to follow a schedule and work every day. But God wants us to work consistently.

“A hard worker has plenty of food, but a person who chases fantasies has no sense.” – Prov 12:11

“If you plan to do evil, you will be lost; if you plan to do good, you will receive unfailing love and faithfulness. Work brings profit, but mere talk leads to poverty!” – Prov. 14:22, 23

Buy now, *pay* later:

People, especially during Christmas, buy what they want to buy, without worrying about the debt they are in. Later, when the bills pile up, people worry about how they will pay. This takes their focus off of Christ. Part of rejecting the world's values is choosing to only purchase what you can afford.

People that run rent to own stores know how to play on our weakness for wanting what we want right now. This is another way our “craving for everything we see” hurts us. Pretty soon, we're not that excited about the new TV, stereo or whatever it is. And the only thing we're left with is high interest and big payments.

Gambling and getting *rich* quick: Another way people are distracted from following Christ is by putting their hopes in hitting in the lottery or making some easy money. But few people have money fall into their lap. And the money we do get is quickly spent. The empty feeling we were trying to fill in the first place is still there. That's because the world's values are empty.

“But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction.” – 1 Tim. 6:9

Gotta man, wanna man, need a *man*:

Some women can't rest until they have a man in their life. But the only man you really need in your life is Christ. If you put your hopes on your next relationship, you're going to be disappointed. Who here hasn't been let down by the man in their life? God loves us and wants us to turn away from putting our trust in these broken values. Hold out for a man who takes God seriously and wants to follow him. If he won't love God, you won't be able to fix him. Don't settle for a guy who doesn't love the Lord. A lot of men think, “If I can get the milk for free, why should I buy the cow?” It's time to tell men like that to get their milk somewhere else. Trust God and let him provide a good man in his own

time. And remember, God doesn't promise that every woman will get a man. He promises to love us and do what is best in our life. If that includes getting a man, he'll make sure it happens.

Natural desire:

Desire for a mate or for recognition are common examples. Some people think that s because God has not delivered up a spouse, that he can't be trusted. We'll just have to go out and do it our way. But Jesus learned to trust God to meet his needs:

“For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.³ During that time the devil came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.’⁴ But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say, ‘People do not live by bread alone, butt by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” – Matthew 4:2-4

Character weaknesses:

We may be prone toward bitterness and judging others. Satan loves to divide churches this way. Lack of control over drinking or in the sexual area can also destroy a Christian walk.

And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, “God is tempting me.” God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else.¹⁴ Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away.¹⁵ These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. – James 1:13-15

Discussion: We may not have described something that you are distracted by. Don't be self righteous and assume you don't have any problems. All of us are distracted in different ways. Where do you stand? What is keeping you distracted from following Christ? Teachers should relate where they fall into seduction. Use this chart to help people place their distractions into the categories in 1 John 2:15-17.

A craving for physical pleasure	A craving for everything we see	Pride in our achievements and possessions
Get me a man Get me a woman Drugs Chilin'	Rent to own Debt SUVs Christmas gifts we can't afford Gambling Lottery/Binko	Surviving Hustling Not taking a minimum wage job

Overcoming seduction

Many Christians are crippled by moral failure. They know they've blown it. Violating our conscience is a serious matter. In defeat, we can stray away from God. There are a couple of things that are important to remember:

We all get seduced from time to time. If you have realized that you are distracted from Christ by something in your life, what should you do?

1. Repentance is key.

Repentance means to "change our minds." It is more than just feeling bad. When you repent, you agree with God that what you have done is wrong.

For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death. – 2 Corinthians 7:10.

2. Use the *word* to fight accusation and deception.

Accusation: When we sin, Satan accuses us. He tells us we have no business following God. We feel bad and then don't want to approach God. Then he accuses us for that, and we feel worse. This leads to a downward spiral away from God. To break this cycle, we need to turn to God's word.

When Jesus used the word against Satan, he was turning to God's promises. So should we. God says if we sin, we can come back to him. He will restore his relationships with us.

"[Jesus] understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." – Hebrews 4:15, 16

Deception: When we sin, sometimes it is hard to tell what is right and wrong, true and false. All of us can be deceived.

Remember that Satan is a liar: Rev. 12:9; John 8:44; 2 Cor. 11:14. He confuses and distorts the truth. We need to be able to "take thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ."

"We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments.⁵ We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ." – 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5

Satan uses deception to keep non-Christians from coming to Christ, and to keep Christians from growing. The solution in both cases is to learn the word. That's really the only objective gauge of truth we have.

3. Pray.

Seduction is very powerful. We can't escape it without God's help. That's why prayer is essential. Regular prayer helps us stay alert.

“Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.” -- Ephesians 6:18, 19.

Through prayer, we can draw on the power of God as we try to overcome seduction in each of the difficult areas we have talked about. Willpower is not enough.

“For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him.” – Philippians 2:13

We need to be transformed--which is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Memory Verse: 1 Peter 5:8