

“Is the Devil Real?”

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Brian Watson

When a mass shooting occurs, like the recent one in Las Vegas, people scramble for answers to the question of why the shooting occurred, and they suggest solutions. It's common for people to assume that mass shootings occur because the shooters are mentally ill. It's common for people to go to their prophets and priests, to psychiatrists and psychologists, for explanations of what happened to the mental health of these shooters. It's common for people to open their Bible, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, better known as the DSM, to find out what labels apply to these shooters. The problem is that most of these shooters did not have serious mental illness. And only about 4% of violence is caused by mental illness.¹ Furthermore, psychiatrists who actually study criminals realize that mental health is not really the root issue. Michael Stone, a forensic psychologist who has studied at least 300 killers, says, “It would be ridiculous to hope that doing something about the mental-health system will stop these mass murders. . . . It's really folly.”²

Why do people insist that mental health is the root cause? Perhaps it's because we can't accept the fact that human beings are by nature capable of committing horrific evil. Perhaps it's also because we don't want to consider any issues beyond the natural realm. We tend to think of mental health in terms of chemical imbalances, or other physical issues in the brain. That fits a naturalistic worldview perfectly well. That worldview says the only reality is physical, the stuff that we can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell, the stuff that we can weigh and measure.

But what if evil comes from beyond the natural realm? What if reality includes things like God and immaterial beings? What if reality includes unseen angels, both good and fallen ones? What if there is a devil and his demons, who try to commit evil and disrupt God's plans?

Recently, we've been answering questions that we have received, and today I want to answer one question: “Is the devil real?”

¹ Jeffrey W. Swanson, E. Elizabeth McGinty, Seena Fazel, and Vickie M. Mays, “Mental Illness and Reduction of Gun Violence and Suicide: Bringing Epidemiologic Research to Policy,” *Annals of Epidemiology* May 2015, 25 (5): 366–377, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4211925/>, accessed October 14, 2017.

² Michael S. Rosenwald, “Most Mass Shooters Aren't Mentally Ill. So Why Push Better Treatment as the Answer?” *The Washington Post*, May 18, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/most-mass-shooters-arent-mentally-ill-so-why-push-better-treatment-as-the-answer/2016/05/17/70034918-1308-11e6-8967-7ac733c56f12_story.html?utm_term=.3eced556e593, accessed October 14, 2017.

More people believe in God and heaven than they believe in the devil. In a 2016 Gallup poll, 79 percent of those surveyed said they definitely believe in God (another 10 percent weren't sure); 72 percent said they believed in angels (12 percent weren't sure); 71 percent said they believed in heaven (14 percent weren't sure); 64 percent said they believed in hell (13 percent weren't sure); and 61 percent said they believed in the devil (12 percent weren't sure).³

It's interesting that people who believe in supernatural realities like God and heaven are less likely to believe that the devil exists. I suppose some people think he's a silly myth. Perhaps one famous line in a movie, *The Usual Suspects*, is true: "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist." That's what C. S. Lewis thought. In his preface to *The Screwtape Letters*, he writes, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them."⁴ If we don't believe in the devil and demons, we can't acknowledge the full reality of evil. If we are too interested in—or too frightened by—the devil, then we'll take our focus off God.

The Bible quite clearly says that the devil, or Satan, exists. So, that is the answer to today's question. The devil is real. And I think, since he is a preternatural being—that means he is beyond the natural world, and we can't see him—we need to have his existence revealed to us. I think his existence explains the personal nature of evil. We get upset when a hurricane or an earthquake kills people. But truly evil acts are personal. Examples of personal evil acts include genocide, mass murder, rape, child abuse, and also betrayal and infidelity. Obviously, humans do these things. But what causes a person to do these things? What is the root of evil, the source of such evil?

While the Bible doesn't tell us everything we might want to know about Satan, it tells us enough to know that he is the enemy of God and God's people, he is someone we should be wary of, and we must resist him. We must be aware that he is the source of lies and murder, that he wants to create division in the world and in the church, that he accuses God's people, and that he has great power. But we should also know that his power is limited and his doom is sure. In fact,

³ Frank Newport, "Most Americans Still Believe in God," *Gallup News*, June 29, 2016, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/193271/americans-believe-god.aspx>, accessed October 14, 2017.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), ix.

there is a sense that he is already defeated, though he is now doing all he can to thwart God's plans.

Today, I want to focus on three things. First, I want to explore Satan's identity. Second, I want to talk about what Satan does. In other words, I want to explore his tactics. And, third, I want to talk about some good news regarding Satan, which is his defeat.

So, who is the devil? We're going to have to do a bit of ground clearing here, because the popular conception of the devil is quite wrong. He's far from a figure in red, with a tail, horns, and a pitchfork. In fact, the Bible says he can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).

Honestly, we don't know a lot about his origins. The first clear reference to "Satan" in the Bible is in the book of Job, which I preached through earlier this year. In that book, there are two scenes in heaven in which God is with the "sons of God," which we assume are angels. We're told that Satan was among them, which suggests that he, too, is angel. Actually, Satan seems to be his title and not his proper name, because in the original Hebrew text, he's called *the Satan*. Satan means "adversary," which gives us an indication of who he is. He is God's adversary, his enemy.⁵

This is what we read of Satan in Job 1:6–12:

⁶Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. ⁷The 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." ⁸And 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?" ⁹Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? ¹⁰Have 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. ¹¹But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." ¹²And 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.⁶

In Job, we see that Satan roams the earth, but he also—at least at this point—had access to heaven. He also accuses Job of serving God only because God has given Job a prosperous life. He claims that if God removes all the good things that Job has, Job will curse God to his face.

⁵ The Hebrew word is שָׂטָן.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

So, God allows him to do some terribly things to Job, including kill all his children, take away all his possessions, and then, later, harm Job's health.

We must admit that it's difficult to understand why God would provoke Satan by bringing up Job's name, or why he would allow Satan to hurt Job and his family. I don't have time to explain all of this, but I did earlier this year, and you can find all of those sermons online.⁷ But the story of Job shows that the whole event actually strengthens Job's trust in God and Job's blessings return. It seems that God wanted to show Satan and Job that someone could worship him even if his life was shattered.

From this, we see that Satan wants to drive a wedge between God and his people. He doesn't want people to worship God. He doesn't want people to trust him. We also see that Satan doesn't fit our preconceived notions of him. Many people think that Satan is a fallen angel who was banished from heaven sometime before the world was created, or at least before human beings were created. That's how it is envisioned in John Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost*. But in the Old Testament, Satan is actually in heaven, with the power to "walk" on the earth.

That reality is pictured in another scene in the Old Testament. This time, it's a vision that the prophet Zechariah sees. We find this at the beginning of Zechariah 3:

¹ Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. ² And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" ³ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. ⁴ And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments." ⁵ And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by.

Commentators believe this scene takes place in heaven.⁸ If it's in heaven, it shows that Satan still had access to that realm in the Old Testament. Joshua was the priest of Israel after they returned from exile in Babylon. The high priest represented God to the Israelites and the Israelites to God. We don't know exactly what sins he had committed, but Satan was there

⁷ At <https://wbcommunity.org/job>.

⁸ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zecharia and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 120; George Klein, *Zechariah*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008), 133.

accusing him. Perhaps he was accusing the entire priesthood, saying that any Israelite would be unworthy to serve as priest because every Israelite had sinned. And that's true. We all have sinned. But Satan seems to take delight in pointing out the unworthiness of sinners. Yet even here, we see that Satan's accusations are met by God's grace. God rebukes Satan and an angel takes off Joshua's filthy garments, representing his sin, and clothes him in clean ones, which shows that he has been cleansed of his sins.

Of course, the most famous appearance of Satan in the Old Testament is at the very beginning of the Bible. He appears in the form of a serpent in Genesis 3. (However, we don't find out that this is Satan until the last book of the Bible, Revelation.) In this famous story, the serpent tempts Eve, the first woman, to doubt God's goodness. He asks her, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1). When Eve says, "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'" (Gen. 3:3), the serpent lies to her and says, "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" (Gen. 3:4-5). This was not true. God didn't want them to eat from that tree because he wanted them to trust him, to trust that what he revealed about good and evil is true. The consequences were cosmically tragic; because Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they were banished from Paradise and from the special presence of God. We're not presented with the serpent's reaction to this sad affair, but I bet he was pleased with his work.

So, from what we can gather from the Old Testament, Satan, the devil, is a rebellious angel who had access to heaven, who doubted God's goodness, who encouraged humans to rebel against him, and who accused God's people of sin. Beyond that, we really don't know a lot more. There's a lot of mystery here. Why would God create an angel who would rebel against him? Why would he be in heaven (as in the books of Job and Zechariah)? Why would he be in the garden of Eden in the form of a serpent? It really doesn't solve the mystery if we say God gave him the choice to rebel. That just raises more questions. Why did God, who knows all things, create a being who would rebel against him? Why would God allow Satan to tempt Adam and Eve? We can speculate all we want, but we would just be guessing in the dark. Perhaps what makes Satan more sinister is the fact that he is so mysterious.

We do get more information about Satan as we turn to the New Testament. It seems that when the Son of God became man, that is, when Jesus was born, there was heightened demonic

activity on the earth. When God came to earth, Satan really got to work. Perhaps the clearest scene regarding this is found in chapter 12 in the book of Revelation. Let's read the first six verses:

¹ And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. ³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. ⁴ His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. ⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, ⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

The book of Revelation is very different because it's full of strange, fantastic images, which are full of very meaningful symbols. Here, we have the picture of a woman about to give birth. The woman appears to represent Israel, the people of God. (The twelve stars representing the twelve tribes of Israel, and possibly also the twelve apostles after the child is born.) She is about to give birth to a very special male child, who will rule the nations. That is the Messiah, Jesus. Right before Jesus is born, "a great red dragon" takes down a third of the stars of heaven and casts them to the earth. These may very well be angels, who became demons. And the dragon wanted to kill the male child when he was born. We know from Matthew's Gospel that King Herod wanted to kill Jesus, because he was threatened by the birth of the true King (Matt. 2). The child, however, was not devoured by the dragon. Instead, he was caught up to God. This vision doesn't tell us why Jesus came, which was to save his people by living the perfect life that they don't live because of their sin and dying in their place, taking the wrath that they deserve. Instead, this image skips to Jesus' ascension, which happened after he died on the cross and after he rose from the grave. And when that happened, the woman, who represents God's people, went into the wilderness, where she was sustained by God. Now let's read verses 7–12 to see what happens next:

⁷ Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with

him. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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!”

Roughly at the time of Jesus’ ascension to heaven, the dragon fought against the archangel Michael, and it was then that the dragon was thrown down from heaven. Verse 9 makes it clear that this dragon is also the serpent of Genesis 3 and Satan, “the deceiver of the whole world.” He and his fallen angels were thrown down when Jesus rose victorious from the grave. He was not thrown down from heaven before the creation of the world.⁹ He is called “the accuser of our brothers,” because he accuses God’s people. In fact, the word “devil” comes from the Greek word *diabolos*, which means “slanderer.”¹⁰ The good news, which we’ll talk about in a moment, is that Satan is conquered “by the blood of the Lamb.” That’s a reference to Jesus’ death. And Satan is also conquered by those who testify to Jesus, who “love not their lives even unto death.” Those who follow Jesus and love him more than life—in other words, Christians—are conquerors of the devil because they are united to *the* conqueror of the devil, and that is Jesus.¹¹

However, though Satan is thrown down and defeated, in one sense, he is still very active. He has come down to the earth and sea—the visible creation—in great wrath, because his time is short. The devil can’t win and he knows it, and he’s quite angry. Again, from what we see of Satan, he hates God and wants to thwart God’s plans, even though no one can actually destroy them. He tries to attack God’s people, even though he can’t ultimately do that. He accuses and slanders and lies. Jesus himself says this about Satan: “He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of

⁹ This fact lines up with what Jesus says in John 12:31, on the eve of his sacrifice: “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” I believe this is also what Jesus foresaw when he says, in Luke 10:18, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” It also seems to fit what Revelation 20:1–6 says, that Satan is bound and placed in a bottomless pit “so that he might not deceive the nations any longer.” If my reading of that passage is correct, the “thousand years” of this period symbolizes the current era, the one between Jesus’ first and second comings. Satan is bound in the sense that he cannot deceive the elect that come from the nations to Jesus. But, in another sense, he is very much active and free to wreak havoc.

¹⁰ The Greek word is διάβολος.

¹¹ See 1 John 5:1–5 and the sermon that I preached on this passage (on July 16, 2017), titled “Who Is It That Overcomes the World?” <https://wbcommunity.org/letters-of-john>.

his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). He would rather fight a losing fight than come under God’s authority. John Milton has Satan say, “Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven.”¹²

So, that is who Satan is. We have already seen some of his tactics, which is the second thing we’ll talk about. His main tactic is deception. This can come through clear lies, or, more often, half-truths. He told Eve she wouldn’t die when she ate the forbidden fruit. Eve didn’t die immediately, nor did Adam. But they did die in a spiritual sense, which guaranteed that they would have physical deaths in the future. The reason anyone dies is because of the presence of sin in the world. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

Satan’s deception can be quite subtle. People who teach false doctrine often can seem very godly. The apostle Paul, one of Jesus’ messengers, warned one church (in Corinth) that false teachers would teach “another Jesus.” These teachers were teaching a “different gospel,” a different message about Jesus (2 Cor. 11:4). Paul then says he will work to undermine these false teachers. He says:

¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds (2 Cor. 11:13–15).

Satan doesn’t come in a red suit, with a tail, horns, and a pitchfork. He works through his servants, who may very well wear nice suits and have big smiles. They talk smoothly and sweetly and say things you want to hear.

Satan can use different kinds of false teachings to lure different kind of people. Satan can tempt people with things like sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Tim. 5:14–15). False teachers often excuse sexual immorality (see 2 Pet. 2). He can also tempt people to believe false doctrines, like that we can’t enjoy the good things God has made (1 Tim. 4:1–5). He will use whatever keeps people from trusting God. After all Scripture says that he is “the god of this world [who] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Another tactic that Satan uses is distraction. He wants to keep us from God’s Word. Jesus once told a parable, an instructive story, about a sower sowing seeds that fall on different types

¹² John Milton, *Paradise Lost* i.263, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), 11.

of ground. When Jesus explains the parable, he says, “The sower sows the word [of God]. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them” (Mark 4:14–15). In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis creatively imagines one senior devil writing to a junior devil, instructing him on the trade of fighting against “the Enemy,” God. In the first letter, Screwtape tells Wormwood about how he once almost lost a “patient, a sound atheist,” because this man was reading books in the British Museum and he started to think about things that would lead him to faith. The devil was able to distract him through hunger, telling him he would be better off coming back to these ideas after lunch. When the man left the museum and reentered the busy world of “real life,” he quickly forgot about those ideas that would lead him to think about God.¹³

I think Satan would be pleased to have us all so entertained and distracted and busy that we never stop and think about what matters. When we are constantly distracted by television, the news stories that then become passionate debates which are rather quickly forgotten, and the digital world of computers, tablets, and phones, we have no time to think about eternal matters.

Satan also uses division, particularly in the church. He delights in our accusing each other, and slandering each other. Paul warns churches that anger (Eph. 4:26–27) and an unwillingness to forgive (2 Cor. 2:5–11) give the devil an “opportunity” and are part of his “designs.” If you know the story of Job, think about Job’s friends. They falsely accused him of sin, which means they were carrying out Satan’s work. The Jewish religious leaders who didn’t believe Jesus did the same thing to him.

As we’ve already seen, Satan points out our sin. He wants us to feel ashamed and unworthy. He wants us to feel condemned, beyond God’s reach and love. There’s a place in Christianity for feeling guilty. When it is used positively, guilt can be experienced as conviction. If you’ve been doing something wrong, and you become aware of it and know that you must change, that is conviction. When you confess your sin to God and ask for his help to stop doing it, that is repentance. It’s a positive thing. But Satan wants us to wallow in our guilt and feel condemned. He wants us to feel like it’s too late to change, like we’re too bad to forgive.

Satan certainly wants to harm us spiritually. If you are united to Jesus, he cannot tear you away from him. But Satan will do everything he can to render you ineffective, to deceive you,

¹³ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 2–4.

and to make you feel miserable. Jesus told Peter that Satan wanted to “sift you like wheat” (Luke 22:31). Peter, in his first letter, warned his readers:

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world (1 Pet. 5:8–9).

Satan can also harm us physically. I don’t think this means that all injuries and diseases are the direct result of Satan’s work. After all, part of God’s judgment against sin in the world is that life is hard and that we die (Gen. 3:16–19). Yet there are accounts in Scripture of Satan giving people physical ailments in order to oppress us and tear us away from God (Job 2:7; Luke 13:11, 16; Acts 10:38; possibly 2 Cor. 12:7 if Paul’s “thorn” was a physical ailment).

Another tactic that Satan uses is to get us to believe we can get back to Paradise without pain and suffering. When Jesus told his disciples that he must die (Matt. 16:21), Peter said, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matt. 16:22). Peter knew that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, God’s anointed King and the Son of God (Matt. 16:16). It made no sense that he would have to die. Peter thought that Jesus would triumph through power. But Jesus corrected Peter by saying, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Matt. 16:23). Peter didn’t understand that it was God’s plan for Jesus to die to pay the penalty for the sins of his people.

Anyone who comes to Jesus and trusts that he is who the Bible says he is and that he has done what the Bible says he has done have their sins paid for. But that doesn’t mean we will live easy lives. In fact, if we follow Jesus, we will face tribulation (John 16:33; Acts 14:22) and persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Satan wants to tempt people to reject such a life (1 Thess. 3:1–5). Those who take the easy path in this life, however, will not have eternal life with God. They may enjoy a life of comfort and ease now, but they will miss out on what is best, which is God. I suppose Satan is pleased with all the false preachers who teach that if you really have faith, God will give you an easy life filled with riches and a wonderful family.

Those are Satan’s tactics. Most of them involve lies.

Though Satan is powerful, there is good news. Though Satan is terrifying, he is a dog on God's leash. He cannot act without God allowing him to act.¹⁴ The good news is that he is already defeated. Even though he is active right now, he is bound by God (Matt. 12:29; Rev. 20:1–3). We have seen that with Jesus' death and resurrection, Satan has been "cast out" (John 12:31) and "thrown down" (Rev. 12:9). He has been conquered by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:11). John tells us that "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). The author of Hebrews says that Jesus suffered and died to bring "many sons to Glory" (Heb. 2:10). Then he says this of Jesus:

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (Heb. 2:14–15).

God's people have no reason to fear death. The fear of death is a form of lifelong slavery. But those who are united to Jesus know that though they die in this life, they will be resurrected to eternal life, which will far outweigh any suffering they experience.

The good news is that Jesus has already triumphed over Satan. Satan tried to stop Jesus. He tempted Jesus, but he couldn't distract Jesus from his mission (Matt. 4:1–11). He accused Jesus through the Pharisees, the Scribes, and the other Jewish leaders who wanted to stop him. And Satan tried to destroy Jesus by having him killed (Luke 22:3–6; John 13:1–2, 21–30). But Jesus rose on the third day after he died, showing that Satan can't stop him and even death can't stop him. It was promised that a son of Eve would crush the serpent (Gen. 3:15), and we find that Jesus has done, is doing (Rom. 16:20), and will finally do this.

The good news is that Satan cannot remove us from the love of God (Luke 22:31–32; John 10:28; Romans 8). Satan cannot break the bonds of the Holy Spirit, who keeps us united to Jesus. He cannot, in the end, touch us (1 John 5:18).

The good news is that Satan will one be destroyed. He and his demons will be removed from God's world forever (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:7–10).

Now, the question is, how do we battle against Satan? How do we equip ourselves to deal with his attacks?

¹⁴ Again, see my sermons on Job, particularly those on Job 1–2 and 38–41, at <https://wbcommunity.org/job>.

The first step is to fear God, not Satan. We are never told to fear Satan. The worst he can do is cause confusion and death. But we are told to fear God. Jesus once said,

⁴“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!” (Luke 12:4–5)

Fearing God means having a proper respect for him. It means knowing that he, not Satan, is the true King, the ultimate authority. And if we fear God, we’ll trust his Son. We will trust that if we have a right relationship with Jesus, his righteous life is credited to us, and his death paid for our sins. That means that our sin cannot keep us from the love of God. If you belong to Jesus, you are forgiven. Your guilt is removed. You have been set free from that slavery.

The second step is to stand firm. James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” The reality is we don’t have to attack Satan. We don’t have to defeat him. He is already defeated. We just have to stand firm in our faith.¹⁵ If you feel like you’re being attacked by forces of evil, don’t do anything but stand firm. Keep trusting Jesus. Call out to him for help.

The best way to not be influenced by Satan is to know the truth. Almost all his tactics involve lies and deception. If we know the truth and really believe it, we won’t be swayed by Satan. That doesn’t mean life will be easy. There will be difficulties. We may feel as if we’re being attacked. We may feel guilty and unworthy. People may even slander us and persecute us. But this is somewhat normal. What you need to do in these situations is keep trusting in the truth of the gospel. Yes, we are guilty of sin. But the reason Jesus came was to save guilty sinners. Remember that though you are sinful, Jesus isn’t, and he gives us his perfect righteousness. He also died to pay for your sins. If you trust that—if you trust Jesus and follow him—you have no reason to fear.

So, is the devil real? The answer is yes. We know this from the Bible, which is God’s revelation to us. And our experience in this life is that there are great evils, such as the Holocaust and other genocides, such as mass murders, that are hard to explain otherwise. Why would people do such things? We can’t simply blame poor mental health. And there are certain evils that seem to go beyond our fallen, sinful nature. The only explanation I can give is that Satan is

¹⁵ See also Eph. 6:10–20 and 1 Peter 5:8–9.

real, and he does his best to kill and destroy (John 10:10). But God is greater than Satan, and he has already won the decisive battle against Satan. One day, the war will be over and all of God's people will live in Paradise. I hope to see you all there.

If you doubt whether you'll be there, if you don't know Jesus, I would love to talk to you about him. Please, don't get distracted by things like your hunger for lunch, or football, or by whatever is waiting for you on your phone. This is too important. If you know the truth, it will set you free (John 8:31–32). It will set you free from the devil, the evil of this world, and slavery to sin and the fear of death. Knowing Jesus will give you freedom to experience the best, most beautiful reality, which is God.