

## What We Believe – 4. Satan

We believe in: *“The personality of Satan, his opposition to God and His purposes, and his corruption and enslavement of man.”*

### A) Introduction

The Christian life is an ongoing battle against unseen *“spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:12). This is a fact from which two opposite errors are common. There are societies who obsess about the invisible spirit beings and look for demons behind every corner. In our own prosperous, materialistic society we tend to the other error – that of ignoring such things altogether.

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches His followers to regularly pray for deliverance *“from the evil one”* (Matthew 6:13). It is therefore our Lord’s expectation that Christians maintain an appropriate conscious awareness of the forces of evil that contend against us. In this study we will limit our focus to the leader of all such forces – often called Satan, or the devil.

### B) Who is he?

Historically, the church has taught that Satan was a high-ranking angel created by God, who fell due to his pride, and now leads the other demons in rebellion against God (ref. Job 1:6-12, Luke 10:17-20, 1 Timothy 3:6, Revelation 12:9). When he was created and when he fell are matters about which the Bible is silent. It is possible that Isaiah 14:12-15 alludes to the fall of Satan, but the primary referent of this description is clearly the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:4).

The characteristics of Satan can be determined from the various names given to him. These are placed within the following categories for the sake of space:

### 1. He is the enemy

The Hebrew word, Satan, literally means the adversary or accuser. He is one who stands against. Jesus explicitly calls him “*the enemy*” (Luke 10:18, ref. also Matthew 13:38-39) and “*the evil one*” (John 17:15). He is the enemy of God, of the holy angels and of all humanity (especially those who belong to God’s family).

### 2. He is the leader of rebellion

Paul calls Satan “*the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*” (Ephesians 2:2) and the “*god of this world*” (2 Corinthians 4:4). He instigated and actively leads all rebellion against God. All humans outside of Christ are part of his “domain of darkness” (Colossians 1:13) and are enslaved under his influence. Or as John puts it, they are “*children of the devil*” (1 John 3:10).

### 3. He is a liar

Satan is “*the father of lies*” (John 8:44) whose very nature is to lie. The common title devil (Greek *diabolos* – hence the term *diabolical*) means slanderer. He is the “*deceiver*” (Revelation 12:9) whose mode of operation is to set forth error and falsehood.

Satan is a formidable foe – stronger, wiser and older than humanity. We are unwise to ignore his existence. However, we should not live in fear of him. He is not a rival to God, but a created being. He does not share God’s incommunicable attributes and therefore cannot read minds, predict the future, be present everywhere or control what happens. The One within us “is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

### C) What is he doing?

In general terms, Satan is continually seeking to oppose God and His purposes (note how Paul confronts Elymas in Acts 13:10). There are various means by which he seeks to do this.

## 1. Temptation

When we first meet Satan in the Bible he comes to tempt the first humans into sin (**Genesis 3**). Note that he doesn't coerce or overpower them into sin. Note also that Eve isn't tempted due to any lack, but because she is "deceived" (Genesis 3:13). Satan does not make us sin, but he tempts us into doing so, often using deceit (ref. David's sinful census in **1 Chronicles 21**). Thus Jesus' model prayer for His followers includes the regular petition, "*lead us not into temptation*" (**Matthew 6:13**).

## 2. Accusation

Satan is also called "*the accuser of our brothers*" (**Revelation 12:10**). In **Job 1-2** and **Zechariah 3** he is shown to be an accuser – bringing the charge of mankind's sin before God. However, since "*we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*" (**1 John 2:1**), none of his accusations can stick on believers.

## 3. Deception

Satan is a liar and "*there is no truth in him*" (**John 8:44**). He is a master of untruth and deceit. Every false doctrine and every false religious system is from him (**2 Corinthians 11:13-14**). He loves to distort the truth about God. In his cunning he will spread different lies in different places at different times. Different cultures worship different idols.

## D) How can we beat him?

Victory against Satan is not ultimately up to us, but has already been achieved by the Lord Jesus. Christ humiliated Satan during His temptation in the wilderness (**Matthew 4:1-11**), He demonstrated His authority over him by casting out demons (**Matthew 12:22-32**), and He decisively defeated him at the cross (**Colossians 2:15**). Consequently he is a beaten and condemned foe, whose eventual sentence of execution awaits the final Day of Judgment (Revelation 20:7-10).

However, it is clear that he is also still a dangerous and active foe today. He "*prows around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to*

*devour*” (1 Peter 5:8). Therefore believers are commanded to “*resist*” him (James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:9), “*stand*” against him (Ephesians 6:11) and even “*wrestle*” with him and his forces (Ephesians 6:12).

Christians overcome Satan “*by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony*” (Revelation 12:11). The first step in fighting him is therefore to be united to Jesus Christ by faith. Outside of Christ we have no hope of freeing ourselves from Satan’s clutches. Jesus came to destroy the devil’s power and to free us from his enslavement (Hebrews 2:14-15).

We battle the Tempter by fighting his temptation. Christians are to wage a life-long war that seeks to “*put to death the deeds of the body*” (Romans 8:13) in the power of the Holy Spirit. We fight Satan as we fight the evil desires that seek to take root within us. This is not a battle we face alone – it is in the power of the Holy Spirit and it should be fought corporately with other brothers and sisters.

The Liar is fought by devouring truth. Satan’s lies thrive on ignorance, but once the light of truth is shone upon them they are exposed for what they are. Any teaching about God or about our nature that doesn’t accord with the Word of God is not to be trusted. Satan loves to spread lies about the character of God, so that we might distrust His goodness – just as he did with our first parents. We must combat this with an ever growing knowledge of the Gospel and of the God it reveals.

We face the Evil One daily, and are therefore instructed to be “*praying at all times in the Spirit*” (Ephesians 6:18). Our awareness of the foe we face should remind us of our weakness and dependence on God. Prayerlessness implies that we can fight the battle on our own, apart from God and His resources.

Our foe is formidable, but we fight from a position of victory. In the Lord Jesus, we are “*more than conquerors*” (Romans 8:37).