

From Acorn to Oak

Who is God, and what is he like? Part 21: What is God's relationship to the angels?

b: *Who are the evil angels and what do they do?*

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In addition to the angels who obey God and accomplish his will for and through them, the Bible teaches that there are those who do evil. Holy and unholy angels are distinguished in Scripture. Satan and his demonic followers, also called the devil and devils, are fallen angels. (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:1-12) They include “the rulers, authorities, and powers” about which Paul writes in Ephesians 6:10-18, a vital text to read, examine, reflect on, pray about, and identify where each part links with our lives.

In his excellent commentary on the Book of Revelation, *More than Conquerors*, William Hendriksen points out the significance of the second major division of the Bible's final book. He states that the theme of the first major division (chapters 1-11) is the victory of Christ and his church over the dragon and his followers and that this theme is continued in the second main division (chapters 12-22). He then explains that while the first part “pictures the outward struggle between the Church and the world, the second part of the book reveals the deeper background. We now see more clearly than in the preceding division that the conflict between the Church and the world is but the outward manifestation of the war between the Christ and Satan (the dragon).”¹ The first half of Revelation describes the evils God's people confront, which we see every day, and the second half reveals the essential invisible cause of those evils that truly exists but escapes the evening news.

Satan and the demons are real. They are personalities, not personifications of an impersonal evil force as even many theologians believe. When Jesus confronted the man who was possessed by an evil spirit, another Biblical term for a demon, in the synagogue at Capernaum, the spirit acted in certain ways and spoke to Jesus; Jesus commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man; and the spirit under Jesus' authority and power obeyed. “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!’ ‘Be quiet!’ said Jesus sternly. ‘Come out of him!’ The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.” (Mark 1:24-26) This text, written in the literary genre of historical narrative, records Jesus talking to living beings. Satan has an intellect (2 Corinthians 11:3), emotions (Revelation 12:17), and a will (2 Timothy 2:26), as does his demonic cohort.

They do exist, and they are not cute, as when some say of a child, “Isn't he a cute little devil!” That expression is a contradiction in terms; the devil and the demons are not at all cute. They are engaged in a cosmic battle against God and his people, seeking to undermine, destroy, and kill what, including those whom, he has created. “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for

¹ William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 134.

someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8) That activity does not fit any standard definition of cuteness. The Holy Spirit also alerts us through Paul’s writing that Satan sometimes disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), and Jesus exposed him as actually being the father of lies and a murderer (John 8:44).

Consider this account from Luke:

Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

¹⁷ When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. (Acts 19:13-20)

Reflect on this event in the light of the unwise and superficial secular thinking today. How many of the sons of Sceva would say that the demonic is only a personification of evil or that this evil spirit was a “cute little devil”?²

The Bible also teaches that believers in Christ have been given gifts to use in his service. (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4) Some, though not all of Christ’s followers, have been given the gift called discernment, the ability to identify the presence of evil spirits and to distinguish between them and spirits from God. (1 Corinthians 12:10)

Demons still enter and possess some human beings. Demonic possession is distinguished from demonic influence. The former involves evil spirits actually entering and controlling human beings; the latter even affects Christians, including those in the process of growing from acorns to oaks of righteousness, as they are tempted and enticed to be drawn away from the things of God.

Demon possession is often seen in other cultures. Missionaries have had many experiences with this activity, and when I was teaching pastors’ seminars on worship in

² One drachma was a silver coin, and in first century A.D. Ephesus it constituted about one day’s wage. Fifty thousand drachmas likely would equal about 10,000 USD today, a huge amount of money in Asia at that time...and even now for most people!

Africa, I heard about it from those in attendance. Our conversation included what to do for demon possessed people in attendance at public worship services when the evil spirits would act out with uncontrolled shrieking during worship. We discussed involving the congregation praying for the individual and, in the name of Jesus Christ, commanding the demon to come out of him or her. If that result doesn't occur immediately (cf. Mark 9:29), the possessed person is led to a room in the church building where some can help him or her while the rest of the congregation continues in worship.

We haven't seen as much open demonic activity in this country until recent times, though it is occurring, as public school officials, police officers, and those with the gift of discernment (1 Corinthians 12:10c) testify. Research in the field of psychology reveals that in virtually all cases of multiple personalities, the afflicted person has been involved to some extent with the occult. A minister with whom I served at another church encountered a young woman, who he perceived was possessed by an evil spirit. Praying over her in Jesus' name and commanding the spirit to leave her, he saw the same result as in the New Testament where such exorcisms occurred through the power of Christ: after causing her to writhe violently and shriek, it left her.

Though demons are created beings and are not divine but are fallen angels who have become committed to evil, demons do have some abilities that humans do not have. At least one, and likely others, can predict the future, and one was so employed in Philippi in Macedonia, in what is northern Greece today.

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."

She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. (Acts 16:16-19)

Evil spirits are still involved in fortune telling. Unless someone is certain he or she has the gift of exorcism, stay away! Yet, if a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ ever finds him- or herself in the presence of a demon, all he or she has to do is to say what Paul said, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you..." and Jesus' power will overcome the demon. Trust in and obey Jesus, and do not be afraid!

While demon possession and demonic influence are serious matters, we need to keep a healthy balance in our perspective. As C. S. Lewis wrote in his classic work, *The Screwtape Letters*, "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. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors....”³ The Gospel of Jesus Christ brings us good news. “You...are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4) We, who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, need not fear Satan and his followers; they are totally in Christ’s control. And Christ loves us!

God and Satan are not peers; God is infinitely greater. Christianity is not a dualistic religion as many seem to think as they talk about God and Satan. Such people appear to believe that when things are going badly Satan has the upper hand but when things are going well God has the devil in a hammerlock. This concept is wrong; it is counter to what the Bible teaches. Satan and the demons are limited beings created by God; they are evil angels who have chosen to oppose him. God is peerless. Satan is a little peanut in contrast with God. If you wonder who a peer of Satan would be, think of another angel. Remember, God is sovereign and all powerful. We who are in Christ need not worry, but neither should we take the demonic lightly.

The failure of many Christians to understand and keep in mind the cosmic and spiritual warfare in which we are engaged has led not a few well meaning but misinformed persons to eliminate from the church’s singing such important hymns as “Onward Christian soldiers,” thinking they glorify war on the human plane. Far to the contrary, these hymns edify and encourage believers in our growth in Christ-likeness, our maturity in the faith, so we can be aware of the spiritual dangers and victorious over Satan and the demons and serve the Lord ever more effectively in the high and holy calling he has given and is equipping us to do. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

Consider just the first two verses of this classic Christian hymn. Sing it!

<h3>Onward Christian Soldiers</h3> <p>Lyrics (1865): Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould; Music (1871): Arthur Sullivan</p>	
<p>1. Onward Christian soldiers! Marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus Going on before. Christ, the royal Master, Leads against the foe; Forward into battle, See, His banners go!</p>	<p>2. At the name of Jesus Satan’s host doth flee; On then, Christian soldiers, On to victory! Hell’s foundations quiver At the shout of praise: Brothers, lift your voices, Loud your anthems raise!</p>
<p>Onward, Christian soldiers! Marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus, Going on before.</p>	

³C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters & Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1961), p. 3.

We should not have a cavalier and lackadaisical attitude about the devil and his demon followers; we should never play in their territory, e.g., consulting mediums or psychics, necromancy, false religions, horoscopes, Ouija boards and the like. (Leviticus 19:31; 2 Kings 21:6; 1 Chronicles 10:13-14) As Lewis also said, the devil is like a dog on a leash. Christ has conquered him in his obedience on the cross and in his Resurrection. However, within the radius of that leash unnecessary harm can come by disobeying God's will. Theologian G.W. Bromiley has rightly written, "These angels and their leader [Satan] were defeated at the cross (Colossians 2:15) and will finally be brought to condemnation (Matthew 25:41)" when the time is right in God's sight.

As I also mentioned in a previous article, Satan and the demons are behind all other religions. We must never let political correctness trump Biblical correctness. As all enemies do, Satan and his ilk are trying to undermine their Opponent; they are trying to draw people away from God, destroy people he loves, and detract from his glory. We must never fail to perceive the demonic influence that is always in the Bible portrayed as influencing people away from God and obedience to him, including worshiping any other being than the triune God who has revealed himself in Holy Scripture. (Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalm 106:37; Revelation 9:20) Concerning nonbelievers, Paul writes "the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's Table and the table of demons." (1 Corinthians 10:20-21) Paul rhetorically asks in 2 Corinthians 6:15, "What harmony is there between Christ and Belial," a Hebrew term that refers to Satan.

Later this year at Halloween your children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews will have some useful opportunities to learn about and highlight their holiness to God, as they engage the surrounding culture. The Bible teaches that God's people are holy to him, i.e., set apart and distinguished from the world, to serve him. Next October they can demonstrate those differences in their choices regarding what to do and not do in school and community Halloween events.

Many stores will be offering costumes of Satan, demons, witches, and other evil characters opposed to God, his Word, and his will. As the children consider costumes, a teachable moment occurs to talk about these important subjects. Questions are always effective learning tools. You might ask children considering costumes from the dark side, "Why would you want to dress like an enemy of God?"

The Bible contains much more information about the holy and unholy angels than space here allows. A Biblically accurate description and analysis of God's Word on this subject is provided by Andrew Bandstra in his excellent book, *In the Company of Angels: What the Bible Teaches What You Need to Know.*

Let's keep learning to nurture our growth in Christ-likeness as we mature into "oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor." (Isaiah 61:3) Let's

also remember who we are, why we are here, our calling, and how we are to prepare for and function in that high and holy calling from God.

¹¹ It was he [Christ (4:7)] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:11-16)