

A Defeated Devil

Neil Girrard

There are many who like to tout the idea of a defeated devil, ridiculing his schemes and devices as just the foolish floppings of a “toothless old tiger” too stupid and inept to be of any harm or threat to their eternal security in Christ. This attitude, founded only partly in truth, stands in stark contrast:

- to Peter’s instruction to be sober, alert, vigilant or wary of our adversary the devil who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Pet. 5:8-9) Since Peter’s letter is written to believers and the instruction to be alert is given to believers, it is only right to conclude that those who could be devoured are believers. Those “theologians” who want to quibble about exactly what “devoured” might mean are already the devil’s victims.

- to Paul’s statement that we wrestle against evil spiritual forces. (Eph. 6:12) The notion that we are to ignore the devil and the demonic in the belief that they cannot harm us in any way is completely inconsistent with the picture of wrestling one’s opponent to the ground. A wrestler who sits back and passively ignores his opponent is most often already pinned to the ground himself.

- to Paul’s comment that we are not to be unaware of the devil’s schemes and devices and that those who are unaware are those who are open to being exploited or taken advantage of by the devil. (2 Cor. 2:11) Those believers who are being exploited are participating in cooperating with the will and plans of the devil and are used as agents to thwart, to whatever degree possible, the wishes and will of God in the lives of those believers. Yes, “all things work together for the good” (for *those who love, that is obey, God and are His called out ones* – Rom. 8:28) but that does not mean all things will work out for the best and highest possible outcome (from God’s perspective) and it is also true that God has yet to save anyone who was not actively and obediently participating with Him in the development of their salvation. Lo, how the traditions of men have twisted the truth!

- to Paul’s exhortation to “wage the good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18) and be “a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. 2:3) What kind of soldier doesn’t need to know who his enemy is and how he fights? The soldier who is ignorant and unaware of these things is most often captured or killed as soon as his feet touch the battlefield.

- to the loud voice from heaven that declares “And they overcame [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die.” (Rev. 12:10-11) Note well the *future* tense employed here. An already totally defeated devil does not need to overcome yet again. Those in this future time who do not utilize these three “weapons” will not defeat him in their own lives.

There are undoubtedly more passages that would apply to this question but these will be enough (for those with ears to hear) to show the fallacy of remaining “blissfully” unaware and negligently blind to the aims and tactics of the devil and the demonic and of believing the devil can be safely ignored as a “toothless old tiger.”

What are the truths contained in the notions expressed at the beginning of this article? Herein lies another of those spiritual paradoxes: the devil was and is and always will be defeated in the cross of Christ. (Col. 2:14-15, etc.) So long as we remain (abide) in Christ – both by faith and in experiential reality – we can indeed partake of His victory over the devil and the demonic. When we, by way of deception (the devil and the demonic’s “native language” and “natural resources” – Jn. 8:44) or lawlessness (doing what is right in our own eyes – Mt. 7:21-23, Jdgs. 21:25, etc.), no longer remain or abide in Him, we are no longer participating in His life and we are being defeated by Christ’s enemies and we will come increasingly under the devil’s power. We do not live in a vacuum – and there is no such thing as a safe, neutral, middle ground or even a “demilitarized zone.”

We must take care here also that we don’t just talk about the cross. We can talk about the cross of Christ all day long and know nothing of its power. If “the cross” or “the blood of Jesus” is nothing more to us than religious jargon or, worse, a superstitious amulet, formula or incantation thrown around whenever we think we need “spiritual protection,” we are most deceived. The kingdom of God is not founded in talk but in power. (1 Cor. 4:20)

The power of the cross is embraced when we submit to God’s searchings and probing and illuminations and tryings of our own intellectual, emotional, volitional and spiritual inner workings so that “the old man” might truly be exposed in all its subtle and hidden ways. (Eph. 4:22, etc.) The power of the cross is not discovered through introspection or psychotherapy any more than it is discovered by negligence, presumption or ignorance.

Any power the devil and the demonic has over the alert believer is not likely to be found in the future so much as it is likely to be rooted in the believer’s past. The devil is no gentleman – he strikes when his victims are unaware and defenseless. He plants seeds in the hearts and minds of children and adolescents before their hearts and minds are trained to embrace truth and reality and especially before their spirits are stirred to new life in Christ. Anyone who doubts this fact is ignorant of his own nature (or has no children and no spiritual discernment!) and has no experience (or understanding of that experience) in overcoming spiritual strongholds in his own life.

The one who introspectively or psychoanalytically explores his own soul in search of evidence of demonic influence and deceptions can only grope blindly in dark places. The psalmist’s prayer is much more in need here: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psa. 139:23-24) God, in His due time - *because* Christ has already defeated the devil and the demonic at the cross – will indeed honor such a prayer and show us all the places and times wherein we inadvertently or ignorantly or even willfully made a place for the devil and the demonic to hide within our soul and exert increasing influence upon our lives. We are not to go “looking for the devil” but rather to submit to God and then *resist* (not ignore) the devil. (Jas. 4:7)

One of the most insidious tricks the devil and the demonic uses is to lure a young or ignorant victim to vow to be significant. “I’ll show them...” or “I’ll be better...” or “different” or “rise above” are vows that carry grave danger. The human heart will indeed pursue these

vows – even long after the intellect has forgotten such a vow was ever made. These vows are what drive many of us to “excel” and/or to be “expert” in various ways and these manifest themselves as feelings of frustration and disappointment with our own achievements or lack thereof (achievements which God Himself will frustrate if tainted by demonic presence or power!) Many a “pastor” wields power and stands over his flock because of such vows. Many a philanthropist uses his money to justify his personal wealth by supporting people and causes he approves of because of such vows. Totally absent from such vows is any thought of submission to God’s will and way – both to respond to whatever first prompted the vow and later to direct one’s way in life. The vow, first purposed in fear or anger and accompanied by spiritual ignorance, now rules and directs one’s conduct (and not the Spirit of truth and life) and the devil and the demonic thereby gains power over the victim and these then quietly reach out to secure more “territory” in the victim’s soul and life. Those who renounce and overcome such past influences are then freed to watch more alertly for the circumstances that would lead them and others around them to make such foolish vows and to help others turn to the Lord to overcome their influence and power.

Again, it must be emphasized that all this is done by listening carefully for and taking one’s cues from God alone. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9) In “the old man,” there is much material the devil and the demonic can work with. “The old man” is most often quite content and comfortable and even welcomed in the modern “church” where the convert to Christ is quickly inoculated to truths about the dangers of demonic deception and disobedience to the Spirit of Christ. The human heart will readily listen to the devil and the demonic (or even to itself!) and convince itself that it is really listening to the voice of God. The devil and the demonic’s main tactics through the “church” is to keep the convert from casting off “the old man” – either through leading them into blatant rejection of some of God’s commands (this is often not very effective) but more usually (and with much greater effectiveness) to fail to have the mind renewed (Eph. 4:23, Rom. 12:2, etc.) and, through carnality and lawlessness, to embrace whatever “theology” appeals to the flesh’s propensity for religiosity.

A spirit is invisible, untouchable and (unless it somehow stimulates our physical senses) beyond the reach of our common sense of touch, smell, hearing, etc. How then do we detect the presence of such a being in the lives of ourselves or others? When we want to know if a heart is being, we feel for a pulse at the neck or wrist – we do not rip open the chest and try to see the beating heart. In the same way, the presence of a spirit within is demonstrated in *attitudes*, particularly attitudes of rebellion, defiance or disobedience toward God. The attitude alone does not conclusively prove the presence of a demonic spirit but it is sufficient cause to seek the Lord on the question and await His answer. For example, the attitude we have been discussing – that the devil is a harmless buffoon to be safely ignored – could very well indicate a major stronghold of religious control by the demonic. Or it could be just one item of deception that has not yet blossomed into an area of demonic control. Either way, *truth* – as the Holy Spirit will lead us into (Jn. 16:13) – will be the ultimate remedy to remove any and every kind of demonic control or influence from one’s life.

The idea of the devil as a defeated foe is the tip of an iceberg. On one hand, in Christ, it is a truth. Yet in the lives of Christ’s genuine followers, the devil’s defeat is progressive and, yes, *if* we will abide in and turn to Christ, his defeat in our lives is even assured. But if we choose to turn a blind eye toward his schemes against us or if we choose to live our lives as we ourselves think best (without consulting and cooperating with God at every step), we are

forfeiting what Christ has given us and the devil may yet gain victories, perhaps even an eternal one, in our life.

It is on this other hand – that we can consult and cooperate with the devil and the demonic rather than (even believing it to be!) God – that the idea of a defeated devil is one of his most effective deceptions. Believers in Christ who believe the devil is already defeated do very little to understand and recognize, let alone combat and curb the demonic schemes against mankind and quite often actively participate in and perpetuate the deceptions! Believers who press on to ridicule the devil have taken up an activity that is characteristic of the apostasy. (Jude 8, 2 Pet. 2:10-11) A defeated devil is indeed a very powerful and very effective lie.

Let he who has ears hear.

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